

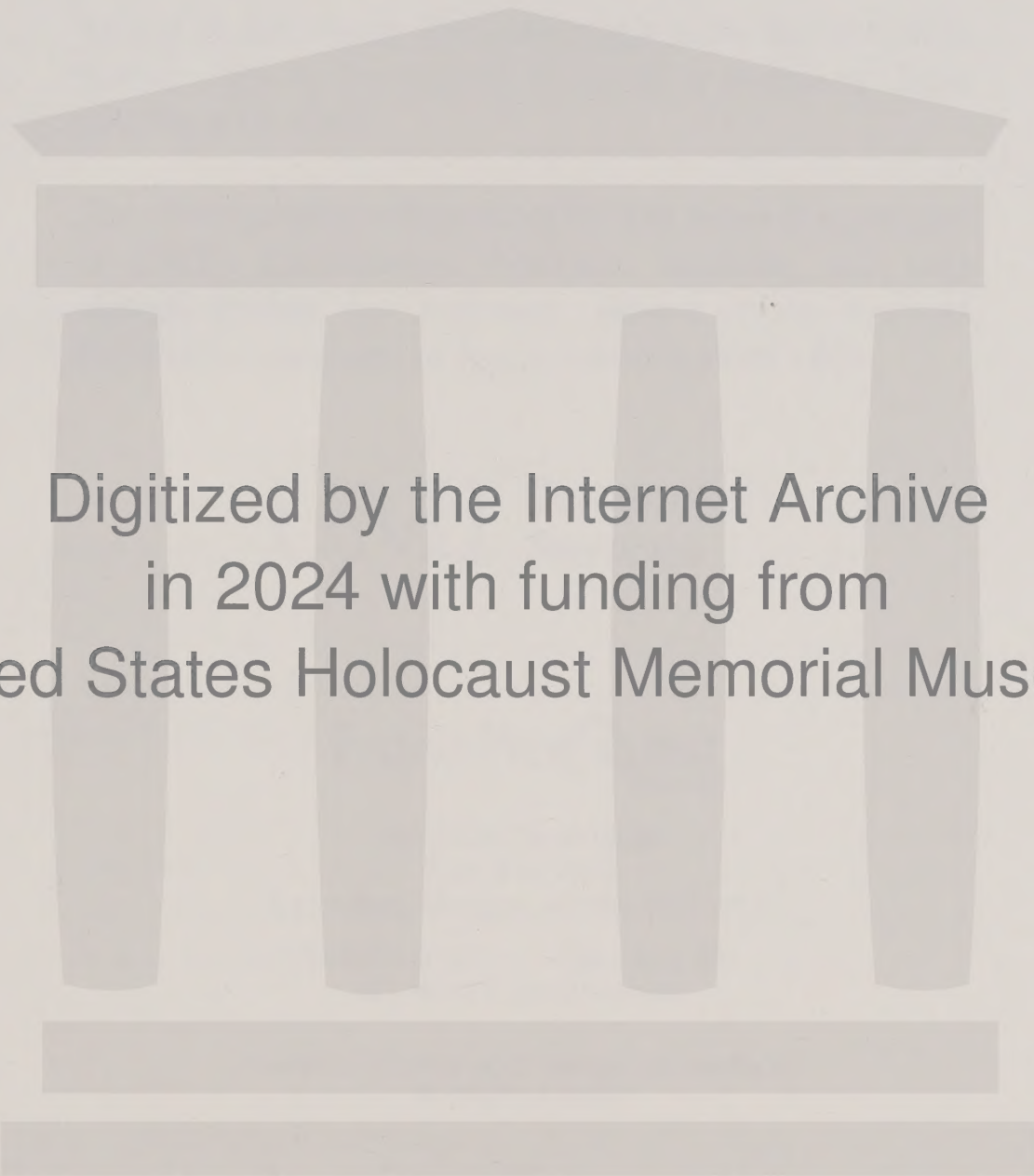


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THE WORST OF TIMES: RECOLLECTIONS

OF A POLISH-JEWISH SURVIVOR

A THESIS

SUBMITTED ON THE EIGHTEENTH DAY OF NOVEMBER 2002

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

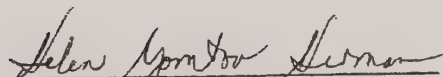
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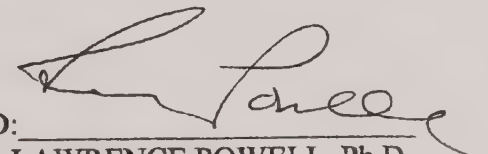
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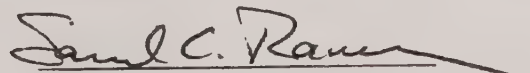

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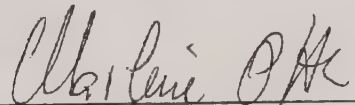


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THE WORST OF TIMES: RECOLLECTIONS
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AN ABSTRACT

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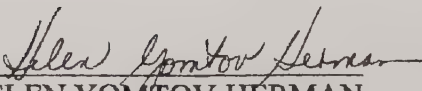
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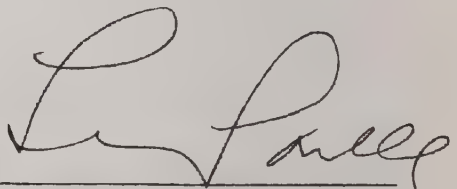
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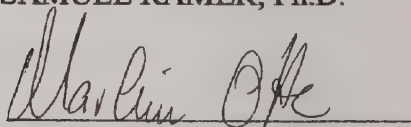
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Abstract

This paper is the memoir of a Polish-Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, annotated with historical references and an introduction written by the narrator's daughter. It is based on the narrator's taped recollections, as told to and edited by her daughter. The narrator was born and raised in Siedlce, Poland, a city located fifty miles east of Warsaw. She describes life in Siedlce before World War II and then recounts the events that took place in Siedlce following the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. The narrator and her husband were among the few Jews to survive the liquidation of the community. Fearing denunciation, they assumed false identities and went to Germany to work. She recounts their experiences working in a factory in Kassel and on a farm near Würzburg. The memoir depicts their liberation and their life as displaced persons in the American zone of Germany, concluding with their emigration to the United States in 1949.

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank my thesis director Professor Lawrence Powell for encouraging me to undertake this project and pushing me to complete it when my morale flagged. Thanks also to my former secretary at Tulane Law School, Michele Saunders, for typing numerous drafts with unfailing good cheer. Thanks to my daughters Jordana and Dara and to my brother Bernie for their interest and support, and especially to my husband Shael, for his large and small acts of kindness. Finally, I give thanks to my parents, who brought me and history together and brought us both to life, and especially to my mother, who agreed to tell this story despite the pain it brought.

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	The Worst of Times: Recollections of a Polish-Jewish Survivor.....	37
III.	Bibliography	287

Introduction

On September 1, 1939, Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Germany, sent his army into Poland and launched World War II. Six years later Hitler was dead, the Thousand Year Reich defeated, much of Europe devastated and millions of people were homeless or dead--killed by starvation, disease, torture, bullets or gas. The survivors turned their energies to rebuilding. They were encouraged to look to the future, not to dwell on the past. For some it was easier than others. Those who spent the war years in their own country suffered deprivation and oppression but were among their own. Soldiers, prisoners of war, forced laborers from the countries of Western Europe generally returned eagerly to their towns and villages; those from Eastern Europe were more ambivalent as they watched the Communist front move westward over their lands. For the Jews who survived Hitler's campaign to create a "Judenfrei" Europe, the end of the war brought some release from the torment of the concentration camps, or others relief from the stress of running and hiding, but for many it brought little joy. They returned home to learn that their relatives and friends were dead, their homes and businesses taken over by others. Jewish survivors from Eastern Europe, especially Poland, were sometimes greeted with attacks from local anti-Semites. As news of these incidents traveled, many abandoned their plans to return home and decided to forsake the old country for a new one.

Perhaps because the war had so marked people's psyches, perhaps because the experiences were still too fresh and too painful, perhaps because the need to restore services and to rebuild was so enormous, perhaps because merely coping required so much energy, perhaps because few people wanted to hear of the horrors and few

survivors wanted to repeat them, very few accounts or memoirs appeared immediately after the war. But as the years passed, more and more survivors began to tell their stories. Whether motivated by the need to bring the story out, to bear witness, to counter historical revisionists, or simply encouraged by the increased interest in the war on the part of scholars and general public alike, they came forward, producing first a trickle, then a torrent of articles, books and even videos.

As a child of survivors, I experienced this reluctant, slowly emerging willingness to tell the tale in my own family. Over the years, I heard bits and pieces of my parents' story, but I never heard the story in its entirety. I do not recall exactly when I first began to wonder what had happened to my parents. I was almost six when we came to the United States, and we spoke German and Yiddish at home. I knew my parents were often sad on week-ends and holidays because there was no family around, but I also knew that letters arrived from relatives in France, Israel, and Poland. At some point I began reading historical novels of World War II, and I clearly remember one day turning on the television to watch "You Are There," a favorite show of mine that reenacted historical events. The episode was "The Bombing of Schweinfurt." My mother quickly came in from the kitchen and asked me to turn it off. All she said was she was there, she couldn't watch it. I didn't press.

By the time my father died unexpectedly in 1962, I knew that they had escaped death in Poland and gone to Germany where they had worked, with false papers, on a farm near a little town called Volkach-am-Main, where I was born.¹ I visited Volkach in December 1963 while I was spending my junior year abroad, but I was ill-prepared with

¹ Volkach is located about twelve miles from Wurzburg. It has been described as a "delightful little wine-growing town...on the east (outer) side...[of] the Main." Michelin Travel Publications, Green Guide-Germany (Watford, U.K.: Michelin Travel Publications, 2000), 542.

no names to pursue, so I could only play tourist and visit the old church, famous for the Riemenschneider woodcarving above the altar.² In 1979 my mother agreed to join me and my husband and children in Germany to show us the farm where she had worked. As we drove through the little towns on two lane roads she suddenly cried, "Stop, here it is." It was the farm. We looked around but she did not want to knock on the door or speak to anyone so we drove off. We spent the night in Tübingen, a charming university town, and drove into France the next day. Once there, she admitted that she was terrified the entire two days in Germany that my two daughters would be kidnapped.

As time passed and more details emerged, I felt it more urgent to have the complete story, and finally, in the summer of 1987, we sat down with a tape recorder. Even then, forty-two years after the war's end, it was difficult for her to recount certain incidents. Ultimately we wound up with sixteen hours of taped recollections. We began with her life in Poland before the war and then proceeded to the war and the years after, ending with our arrival in the United States in June 1949. We did not confine the taping to the war years because I wanted to hear about her life in Poland before the war and also thought it might be easier for her emotionally to begin by talking of a less traumatic period. I also wanted to learn more about my parents' life in post-war Germany. I tried to ask questions only to encourage her to discuss different aspects of life before the war or to help her to continue the story. Once all the taping sessions were completed, I had the tapes transcribed and began the process of editing them. I wanted the finished product to be my mother's voice, but I also wanted to eliminate repetition and to make the story flow smoothly.

² Tilman Riemenschneider (1460-1531), "The Master of Würzburg," was a great sculptor and woodcarver. *Ibid.*, 537. The Riemenschneider carving in Volkach's fifteenth century pilgrimage church "Maria im Weingarten" (Mary in the Vineyards) is a "Virgin with Rosary." *Idem*, 542.

Ida's memoir expresses her personal perspective on three different periods—Poland in the years before World War II, the war years in Poland and Germany, and the post-war years in Germany. Ida did not come from a shtetl family; her childhood, adolescence and young adulthood were not spent in one of those now almost mythical poor little villages. She grew up in a city, Siedlce, whose pre-war inhabitants numbered about 40,000, of whom more than a third were Jewish.³ She was raised in a middle-class, fairly assimilated family. Ida, her brother Wit, and her husband David did not try to hide in Poland, as many Polish Jews did, but instead fled to Germany. This seems surprising, like going “out of the frying pan into the fire,” yet under the circumstances, it made sense. They were known in their town and they felt they had a better chance of concealing their identity in the large labor camps set up in Germany where they were totally unknown. Given the number of Poles who were willing to blackmail Jews or denounce them for money or other rewards, their decision seems logical.⁴ Ida tells how they managed their escape to Germany and relates their experiences there. While there

³Siedlce is located about fifty miles east of Warsaw. Jews lived in Siedlce from the middle of the sixteenth century. In the nineteenth century they represented more than sixty percent of the city's population. The Jewish proportion of the population declined in the twentieth century but was still significant in 1939, when fifteen thousand Jews lived in Siedlce, about one-third of the city's population. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Siedlce.”

⁴ Jews who tried to survive by hiding or passing as Poles were hounded by “schmalzowniks” (from the Polish word for grease or fat) and blackmailers who extorted money and belongings from them at every turn. These scoundrels threatened to turn the Jews in to the authorities and frequently did after they had taken all their valuables. Knowing the inhabitants of their towns and villages, better able than the Germans to identify Jews by their accents, gestures, and speech patterns, some Poles denounced Jews who might have escaped Nazi notice. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, ed. Joseph Kermish and Shmuel Krakowski, trans. Dafna Allon, Danuta Dabrowska and Dana Keren (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 123-126. Ringelblum thought the anti-Semitic propaganda disseminated by radio, leaflets and posters encouraged these hoodlums in their conduct, and he castigated the Polish government-in-exile and the Polish underground for failing to take strong measures against them. *Idem*, 128. Nechama Tec, who studied and interviewed Jewish survivors and Polish rescuers, also concluded that blackmail and denunciation, while motivated by native anti-Semitism, were encouraged by Nazi propaganda, which depicted Jews as evil and dangerous, and by Nazi rewards, which varied with locality but included such valuable items as sugar, vodka, cigarettes and clothes. Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 41. Of the Jewish survivors Tec interviewed, seventy-one percent had been blackmailed at least once. *Idem*, 47.

were certainly other Polish Jews who took the same path, I have found very few memoirs by Polish Jews who fled to Germany and survived there.⁵ The memoir also captures the atmosphere of the immediate post-war years among a specific population, the displaced people of Europe. The war's end found about eight million foreigners in Germany.⁶ Many began heading home immediately, but others could not or would not do so. The military quickly set up camps to house and feed these people, but the work of administering these "displaced persons" camps was soon assumed by civil relief agencies. Ida's memoir describes the activities and the mood in the camps, as some refugees awaited repatriation, some fought it, and most waited and waited and waited – either to be selected by a visiting commission to emigrate to some Western country or to be allowed to enter Palestine.

Unfortunately, I had not completed working on the transcript when my mother died unexpectedly in 1991. It took me sometime to get back to the transcript; once I did so, I realized that some pronouns had indeterminate antecedents, some dates were wrong and some descriptions unclear. Where possible, I have corrected errors in dates in footnotes. Unfortunately, some discrepancies can no longer be clarified. For example, the details of my mother's departure from Poland to Germany are recalled differently by my mother and her brother. I have cited his recollection for the sake of completeness, though I believe my mother's recollection is substantiated by letters written soon after the war by

⁵ Ringelblum states that some Jewish women tried to survive by volunteering for work in Germany. However, once the German Labor Office, the Arbeitsamt, discovered this, it brought in a special agent, a Jew, to identify them. Jewish men were less likely than Jewish women to seek work in Germany because they feared the medical examination. He concludes that "in view of the difficulties connected with leaving for Germany, the Jews have to look for other ways." Ringelblum, Relations, 102.

⁶ Mark Wyman, DP: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951 (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989), 22. They included POWs, concentration camp survivors, forced laborers from occupied countries, and Eastern Europeans who came to help the Germans or to escape the Russians. Leonard Dinnerstein, America and the Survivors of the Holocaust (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 9.

my father. In any case, I do not believe the difference in details significantly diminishes the value of the memoir. Like other survivors' accounts, Ida's may show some confusion over details, but these minor errors do not negate the authenticity of the whole. Whether my mother left for Germany with David and Wit or went by herself a few weeks later does not alter the fact that they all believed that they had to leave the city where they had lived all their lives because they were in imminent danger of losing their lives there.

Ida Tenenbaum Yomtov was born in December 1914, a few months after World War I began. At that time no independent Poland existed and her birthplace, Siedlce, was in the part of Poland under Russian rule. Poles greeted the creation of an independent Poland at the end of the war with great hopes, but the country soon experienced economic difficulties and political turmoil. Unemployment was high, many peasants were landless or had plots too small to sustain them, and inflation was persistent. Between 1918 and 1926 fourteen governments came and went because none of the major parties could get a majority in Parliament.⁷ In creating an independent Poland, the Allies had required Poland to sign the Minorities Treaty guaranteeing equal rights to all its minorities.⁸ As the second largest minority,⁹ the Jews hoped that the treaty would facilitate their full

⁷ Celia S. Heller, On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland between the Two World Wars (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 87. Governments changed frequently because there were many political parties and factions represented in the parliament. Joseph Marcus, Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919-1939 (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1983), 18. At one point there were ninety-two officially registered political parties. Tec, When Light, 14.

⁸ Ibid., 54. Poland signed the Minorities Treaty on June 28, 1919, the same day it signed the Versailles Treaty guaranteeing its independence. The Minorities Treaty consisted of twelve articles. Among the most important were Article 2, which guaranteed the basic rights of life, liberty and religious freedom, and Article 7, which stated that "Differences of religion, creed or confession shall not prejudice any Polish national in matters relating to the enjoyment of civil or political rights, as for instance the admission to public employment,... or the exercise of professions and industries..."

⁹ The largest minority, the Ukrainians, numbered 4.5 million. The next largest group was the Jews, at 3.5 million, followed by the one million Belorussians. Tec, When Light, 14. According to Heller, the 1931 census counted 3,113,933 Jews in Poland, 9.8% of the country's population. The Ukrainians represented 13.9% and the Belorussians 3.1%. Heller, Edge, 71.

participation in Polish economic and political life, but the Poles resented the treaty, considering it an insult to their national honor and an unjustified intrusion into their internal affairs, and soon began to violate it.¹⁰ The recurrent strains of anti-Semitism soon reappeared. Jews were accused of helping the Bolsheviks in the 1920 war with Russia. There were pogroms, boycotts of Jewish shops, and discriminatory hiring measures barring Jews from employment in public transportation, the civil service, and certain nationalized industries.¹¹ Quotas limited Jewish access to higher education.¹² Ida saw the effect of this discrimination on her friends and relatives; some left to study in other countries and some had great difficulty finding work. She herself came from a somewhat privileged family. Ida's father owned a factory which produced sporting goods; he employed prisoners from the large Siedlce prison and was apparently recognized by the government for his rehabilitation work with them. The family lived in a comfortable apartment equipped with electricity but lacking indoor plumbing or running water. Like most people in Siedlce, they did not own a car or a phone: they did, however, have a

¹⁰ Commenting on Polish reaction to the Minorities Treaty, one historian writes, "To a great extent the Poles were justified in maintaining that this treaty expressed lack of confidence in the ability and will of certain countries to guarantee equal treatment of their minorities.... [However] the Polish policy toward the minorities in general and Jews in particular vindicated post factum those who were suspicious of Polish intentions and demanded the imposition of the Minorities Treaty in principle." Yisrael Gutman, "Polish Antisemitism Between the Wars: An Overview," in The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars, ed. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz and Chone Shmeruk (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 100. Gutman adds that "Polish Jews were not greatly benefited by this treaty, as authorities in Poland... always managed to find a way to circumvent its terms." Idem, 100. In a letter to the Secretary of the Polish Legation in Washington written more than a year after the Minorities Treaty was signed, Louis Marshall stated "The reports that come from Poland... satisfy me that... the letter and spirit of this treaty have not been observed, and that the Jews continue to be subjected to all manner of hostility and discrimination." Heller, Edge, 57.

¹¹ Heller, Edge, 106.

¹² Polish universities were rife with anti-Semitism, with Polish students terrorizing Jewish students and demanding Jewish quotas. The first quotas in independent Poland were established in 1921, but the Minister of Religious Creeds and Public Education ordered them rescinded because they violated the Polish constitution. Nevertheless, student agitation continued and informal quotas appeared at some universities in 1924. When Jewish representatives appealed to the government, they were told the government could do nothing because the universities were autonomous. For their part, the Polish students were still not satisfied and pressed for an official quota at all institutions of higher education. Ibid., 120-121.

radio and phonograph. They went to movies and plays and spent much time visiting with friends and relatives. Except for the untimely death of a younger brother, the family's life in these years seems to have been fairly happy. Because of her father's connections in the government, Ida and her brothers were among the few Jewish children in Siedlce allowed to attend the public state-supported schools. The girls' school Ida attended had polished floors and white curtains at the windows. The students wore soft-soled slippers so that they would not make noise when they walked. Each room had a crucifix and each day began and ended with a prayer. Ida took the prayers in stride, but the Jewish children were teased about their Jewish names, and this upset her. The family was not especially religious—they did not keep kosher or wear traditional clothes and only attended religious services on the major holidays. In this, they were typical of that segment of Polish Jewry that was secularizing but still retained its Jewish identity.

Contrary to popular Polish stereotypes, the majority of Polish Jews were poor. Few were wealthy or even upper middle-class; most were artisans, owners of small businesses or peddlers.¹³ Jewish poverty increased during the twenty years of Polish independence between the world wars, partly because the Polish government came to consider Jews as the major source of the country's economic woes and passed several measures aimed at reducing their economic power.¹⁴ Anti-Semites claimed that Jews

¹³ Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 396. Marcus' analysis of 1929 economic statistics showed that 58.5% of the Jews were small shopkeepers and independent craftsmen, and 26.3% were wage earners; for non-Jewish Poles, the percentages were 19.1 and 57.2 respectively. Marcus, *Social*, 45. He found that almost 95% of the "petit bourgeois" of both groups were "virtually paupers." Idem 47, 49. He concluded that the average Polish Jew was poor by western standards but not poorer than the average Pole. Idem, 41. More than half of the non-farm population of each group lived at or below the level of subsistence. Jewish income was more unequally distributed, with a large gap between the small wealthy minority and the large impoverished majority. Idem, 49.

¹⁴ Heller, *Edge*, 74. Laws which adversely affected Jews included the nationalization of industries which Jews had begun like tobacco, salt, matches and alcohol, a Compulsory Sunday Rest Law which made Saturday work obligatory, thus eliminating Jewish workers from government enterprises and hurting Jewish

controlled the economy because six out of every ten people in business and commerce were Jews.¹⁵ Actually, the concentration of Jews in these occupations meant quite the opposite. Most barely eked out a living in these financially precarious enterprises; artisans and shopkeepers frequently lived with their families in one room behind the shop. Many would probably have preferred to work at more lucrative and more secure jobs in nationalized industries, in transportation or in the civil service, but could not because of discriminatory hiring practices.¹⁶

Despite the widespread poverty, Jewish life in Poland in the inter-war period was quite rich and diversified. There were Jewish clubs, Jewish theatres, and Jewish newspapers. Jewish communities organized their own charities and relief institutions, orphanages, hospitals and burial societies. In Siedlce, the community organized a special bank that made no-interest loans, and community groups worked to assemble trousseaus for poor girls and to send poor children to camp. The Jews even organized their own political parties which presented candidates in national and local elections. The number and variety of these parties reflected the fragmentation and factionalism that characterized the community. They included Zionist groups that thought the only solution to the Jewish problem in Europe was the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, socialist and Bundist parties that focused on improving the people's lot in Poland, and

shopowners who could not afford to be closed two days a week, and the withdrawal of concessions for the distribution of certain products and their reissuance to Polish veterans. Government unemployment benefits were limited to enterprises having five or more employees, rendering most Jewish unemployed ineligible. Government orders to modernize forced many small businesses to close, as they had neither the capital nor the credit to modernize. A 1927 law ending the free practice of crafts and requiring artisans to get a license endangered many of Poland's Jewish artisans, as the licensing examinations had to be taken in Polish, which many of the older artisans did not know. Heller, *Edge*, 100-105. Gutman adds that taxation and credit policies exhibited "anti-Jewish tendencies or outcomes." Gutman, *Polish Antisemitism*, 103.

¹⁵ Heller, *Edge*, 98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 100. Eighty percent of Jewish workers, but only forty percent of non-Jewish workers, worked in small shops. On the other hand, only 3.5% of Jewish workers, but 37.4% of non-Jewish workers worked in the largest Polish enterprises. *Idem*, 101.

Agudah, a religious party. Adherents spent much time and energy in expounding their views and fighting over arcane doctrinal differences. Factionalism also characterized Jewish religious education, as some thought the schools should teach in Hebrew, while others favored Yiddish or Polish. Though not a large city like Lodz or Warsaw, Siedlce was, in Ida's words, a microcosm, a small pond in which these same currents swirled. Differences in religious beliefs and practices could be found even within one family. Ida notes, for example, that her mother's older brother, a leader of the religious party, would not eat at her house because they did not keep kosher. Furthermore, while she and her brother attended the government school, he picketed outside the school protesting its Saturday courses. Social expectations also varied with different classes. As Ida saw it, women in poorer classes might work, helping out in the family store, but women in her class did not work. Ida's mother had a maid and devoted her energies to the Jewish orphanage. When Ida completed high school at age seventeen, she wanted to study textile design in Paris or engineering in Warsaw, but her father refused to let her go to Paris and the school in Warsaw refused even to consider her. Her father was willing to let her study law because she could study that at home, but she was not interested in law. So she spent the years after high school socializing, helping friends whose family businesses were in difficulty, and helping her father in his factory. Social mores were changing, though; Ida's friends went out together in mixed but unchaperoned groups. Matchmakers still had a role, but in her circle young people made their own matches, though parental approval was still required.

After Hitler's ascent to power in Germany in 1933, tension in Europe and anti-Semitism in Poland increased. Ida attributes this increased anti-Semitism to the influence of the Nazis next door, and their presence surely contributed, but historians suggest that

the deteriorating economic conditions of the 1930's and the death of Marshal Jozef Pilsudski in 1935 contributed more significantly to the increased virulence of the home-grown variety.¹⁷ Pilsudski, widely regarded as a national hero for his role in the struggle for independence, took over the government in a coup d'etat in 1926, at a time when the country was experiencing a political and financial crisis.¹⁸ Because he was not considered an anti-Semite like some of his opponents, Jews greeted his takeover with renewed hope for an improvement in their situation. There was a slight improvement initially, but Pilsudski's party, the Sanacja, soon began moving to the right. In January 1934 the government signed a nonaggression pact with Germany; in September 1934 it renounced its obligations under the Minorities Treaty.¹⁹ With Pilsudski's death in 1935, the rightward movement accelerated, as his successors sought to keep their hold on power by imitating their rivals, the National Democrats (Endecja), and adopting the anti-Semitic policies that seemed popular with the populace.²⁰ In May 1936 the new prime minister,

¹⁷ Much has been written about Polish anti-Semitism, which certainly existed before the twentieth century but intensified in the years preceding World War II. It is generally described as having four components. One was religious-Poles were fervently Catholic and many still considered the Jews to be Christ-killers and ritual murderers. Another was nationalistic-nationalists regarded Jews as a foreign element in the Polish nation. The third was economic-Jews were stereotyped as capitalist exploiters who wielded great economic power. The last was ideological-Jews were branded as communists, Bolsheviks, prepared to betray Poland to the Soviet Union. With these four potent components appealing to diverse segments of the population, it is easy to understand why anti-Semitism was so pervasive.

Writers generally agree that there was not much racism in Polish anti-Semitism. However, Nazi influence appeared in Polish attempts to copy Nazi legislation and "to adapt German methods of harassing Jews to Polish conditions." Gutman, Polish Antisemitism, 106.

Melzer contends that "Polish anti-Semitism was a strong political factor in its own right, but it was also greatly influenced... by the victory of racial ideology in Germany..." Emanuel Melzer, "Antisemitism in the Last Years of the Second Polish Republic," in The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars, ed. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz and Chone Shmeruk (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 134. Polish professional organizations, for example, began inserting restrictive paragraphs which used terms such as Aryan in their bylaws. Idem, 135.

¹⁸ Heller, Edge, 89. Before taking power, Pilsudski belonged to the Socialist Party, which opposed anti-Semitism. Although he left the party, he continued to oppose anti-Jewish measures. Tec, When Light, 15.

¹⁹ Melzer, Antisemitism, 127-8.

²⁰ Heller, Edge, 91-92; Melzer, Antisemitism, 126; Gutman, Polish Antisemitism, 103. The National

General Slawoj-Skladkowski, approved an economic boycott of Jewish businesses, a boycott supported by the Catholic Church.²¹ In January 1937 the government passed a law restricting ritual slaughter; this law obviously infringed upon the freedom of observant Jews to practice their religion; less obviously, it aimed at eliminating Jews from the meat trade, an area of the economy in which they still had a significant presence.²² In September 1937 the Minister of Education authorized the universities to establish separate seating for Jewish students.²³ Jewish university students, already the target of verbal and physical abuse, now had to choose between standing up through their classes or sitting on the “ghetto benches.”²⁴ Anti-Semitic articles circulated widely, and religious Jews, easily identifiable by their clothes and hair, were beaten. In the years just prior to the war, almost all the political parties came to agree that the only solution to Poland’s problems was the reduction of the Jewish population through mass emigration. The parties differed only in the degree to which they were willing to resort to violence to encourage the Jews to leave.

Poles may have looked with favor on Hitler’s anti-Jewish policies, but when he took over the Sudetenland and annexed Bohemia and Moravia²⁵ and began demanding the Polish corridor, they became alarmed. When he renounced the nonaggression pact

Democrats were led by Roman Dmowski, a virulent anti-Semite who considered the Jews a foreign body and subversive element in the Polish nation. As early as 1903, the party’s platform called for the removal of Jews from important economic positions and the reduction of their cultural and social influence. In 1912 Dmowski and his party instigated an economic boycott of Jewish businesses. Gutman, Polish Antisemitism, 98-99.

²¹ Melzer, Antisemitism, 128.

²² Ibid., 130.

²³ Ibid., 130.

²⁴ From 1925 to 1939, the percentage of Jewish students enrolled in Polish universities declined from 21.5% to 8.2%, largely because of assaults, harassment, and quotas. Tec, When Light, 17.

²⁵ March 15, 1939. Dawidowicz, War, 375.

with Poland on April 28, 1939,²⁶ his intentions became clear and war seemed imminent. Poland was not about to surrender the corridor. Ida describes the charged atmosphere of the days preceding the German attack and the anxiety of the Jews who heard what was happening to their co-religionists next door but saw no avenue of escape. One has to wonder why the Tenenbaums, who seemed to have the economic means to escape, did not leave earlier, given the unhappy situation in Poland, but perhaps they did not go when there was still time precisely because their personal situation in Poland was comfortable before the war. Ida says that they stayed because there was no place to go. However, many Jews did emigrate in the inter-war years. Some went to France, like one of David's sisters who, with her husband, joined a small community of former Siedlce residents living in Paris. Some went to the United States, others to Palestine. All told, approximately 385,000 Jews left Poland in the period from 1919 to 1939.²⁷ Perhaps the Tenenbaums stayed because they were in the enviable position of having something to lose, while those who left had little.

Ida also says her family remained because they doubted that Hitler would carry out his threats against the Jews. Considering the news reports reaching Poland from Germany, and the accounts of Polish Jews forcibly returned to Poland from Germany, it is hard to understand why the family did not realize that they were in danger.²⁸ Ida says,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁷ Marcus, *Social*, 388. Approximately 140,000 emigrated between 1932 and 1939. Of the 385,000 total, 144,000 went to Palestine.

²⁸ Hitler's accession to power on January 30, 1933, was followed by the enactment of laws excluding Jews from the civil service, the professions, cultural enterprises and limiting their enrollment in educational institutions. Dawidowicz, *War*, 58-59. Jews were disenfranchised and their businesses were taken over. As they became increasingly isolated and impoverished, many Jews emigrated.

In 1938, the German Foreign Office discovered that about ten percent of all Jews living in Germany were Polish nationals. In October 1938 it forcibly expelled 15,000 of these Polish-born Jews and sent them in sealed trains to the Polish border. The Polish government refused to let the trains continue into Poland, so the

[W]e knew some of what was happening, but just as in 1942 when they liquidated the ghetto, we didn't believe. There is something in a person, a self-preservation instinct, which doesn't let you believe things which are so bad. You form a block against it. We thought that maybe the situation was not so bad, that maybe these people were scared because the Germans threw them out, so they exaggerated. The same thing happened when we heard about Treblinka—nobody believed. (p.127-128).

One might quibble with Ida's characterization of this incredulity as a self-preservation instinct, as it obviously kept her family and many others from taking the actions that might have saved them, but some psychologists do consider denial "a tool of adaptation, a means of coping with an intolerable situation in the absence of any possibility for defensive action."²⁹ Certainly many others found it difficult to believe what was happening. Louis deJong, a Dutch historian, has said,

[T]he Holocaust, when it took place, was beyond the belief and the comprehension of almost all people living at the time, Jews included. Everyone knew that human history had been scarred by endless cruelties. But that thousands, nay millions of human beings...would be killed, finished off, mechanically, industrially...would be exterminated like vermin—that was a notion so alien to the human mind, an event so gruesome, so new, that the instinctive, indeed the natural, reaction of most people was : it can't be true.³⁰

This inability to believe the worst was abetted by the Nazis' cunning use of deception. The Germans went to great lengths to conceal their activities. Ghetto gates frequently bore signs saying they were closed because of epidemics. Concentration and

Jews had to stay in the Polish border town Zbaszyn. This small town was totally unprepared to deal with the influx and living conditions were terrible. However, when the Poles responded by sending trains filled with Jews of German nationality toward the German border, the two countries reached a compromise. The Poles admitted 7,000 Jews, the Germans took in some of their nationals, some were allowed to return temporarily to their homes, but many had to stay in Zbaszyn. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 158-159. The Zbaszyn affair led indirectly to Kristallnacht, the "night of broken glass," November 9, 1938, when Jews were beaten, Jewish businesses destroyed, and Jewish synagogues burned throughout Germany. Hershl Grynszpan, the seventeen year old son of a Polish couple expelled to Zbaszyn, was so upset by his parents' deportation that he assassinated Ernst vom Rath, the Third Secretary in the German Embassy in Paris, on November 7, 1938. Rath's death provided Nazi leaders an excuse to whip up mob violence against the Jews of Germany and to complete their expropriation. Dawidowicz, *War*, 100-102.

²⁹ Dawidowicz, *War*, 306. In her opinion, denial was the alternative to despair.

³⁰ Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 35.

extermination camps were usually located in remote areas. Jews who were being sent to death camps were told they were being “resettled” and were allowed to take a suitcase filled with personal possessions. People on the death trains were ordered to write cards to their relatives in the ghettos informing them that they had arrived safely and that their living and working conditions were satisfactory. The cards sustained the illusions of the ghetto residents even as news of the reality of “resettlement” began to seep through the ghetto walls.³¹ Ida personally witnessed this German duplicity on two occasions. After the Siedlce ghetto was liquidated, the Germans learned that a number of women had survived and were in hiding. To get these women to come out, the city commissar offered them amnesty if they would clean up the ghetto. The women emerged and he selected thirty volunteers, assuring them that they would return unharmed. After they had worked all day in the hellhole that had been the ghetto, they were shot, supposedly because they had stolen some food they found there. Three months later, in November 1942, the two thousand Jews remaining in the Siedlce area were transported to some houses outside Siedlce, at a site called Gesiborki. There, they were told, they could live quietly until the war was over. Ida, who was with a small group of people working at a glass factory nearby, looked in one evening to see if David was with them, but he was not so she returned to the hut where she was living. The next morning she awoke to the sound of

³¹ Hilberg contends that the German deceptions were very crude and wonders how the Jews could have been fooled by them. He suggests that “The Jews did not always have to be deceived, they were capable of deceiving themselves. In his opinion, even in their sealed ghettos the Jews “had to become conscious of a growing silence outside. The killings might have been secluded and shrouded in secrecy, but the disappearance of people could not be concealed.” Hilberg, *Destruction*, 301. However, isolated in their ghettos, the Jews received very little news from the outside world; they did not necessarily know that the people who had disappeared were dead. When they grew suspicious of what resettlement really meant, they were reassured by the authorities. When they finally learned the truth, it was too late to offer much effective resistance. Even the Warsaw ghetto revolt was put down with little serious damage to the Nazis. Perhaps, as Dawidowicz suggests, self-deception and denial were means of coping with an impossible situation. Rooted in hope, in wishful thinking, they permitted people to believe they could escape death by being useful, by working harder. They may have kept some people from despair, but they may also have kept some people from fleeing or escaping at a time when escape was still possible.

guns; the Germans had surrounded the houses and were packing the people into trains, shooting at any that tried to run away.

Ida was twenty-four on September 1, 1939, when German soldiers crossed the Polish border and German planes bombed Polish cities. She was still living at home, helping her father with his factory. She and her future husband, David Yomtov, were unofficially engaged to be married. She describes the unfolding events vividly—the bombing of Siedlce, the government's flight from Warsaw, the family's flight to an outlying village, the entry of the German soldiers into Siedlce on September 11.³² Unbeknownst to the Poles, Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Union's foreign minister, and Joachim Ribbentrop, Germany's foreign minister, had signed a secret agreement on August 23, 1939, dividing Poland between them, along the river Vistula.³³ Since Siedlce was east of the Vistula, it should have been in Russian hands. However, the Germans had gone beyond the line. To honor their agreement, the Germans withdrew and the Russian army moved in. But the Russians did not stay long. In a rare burst of generosity, Stalin agreed on September 29 to move the demarcation line east from the Vistula to the Bug River.³⁴ Since Siedlce lay west of the Bug, it fell again under German control.

The Russians only stayed in Siedlce a few days, but before they left, they made the inhabitants an offer that required an agonizing decision, one of several that people would be called upon to make in the days ahead. Before departing, the Russians offered the Poles the opportunity to go with them across the Bug to the Soviet Union. Ida says

³² Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Siedlce."

³³ Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 2:433. The secret protocol also delineated each country's sphere of influence. Lithuania was placed in the German sphere, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland in the Russian. Dawidowicz, *War*, 110.

³⁴ Martin Gilbert, *Second World War* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), 16.

that many people went; many others, including her family, did not. She offers several explanations for their decisions, but in her family's case, it seems that antipathy for Communism and the belief that the war would soon end led the family to stay in Siedlce despite what they had heard of Hitler's treatment of the Jews. Ida justifies this decision by describing the hardships encountered by those who did go to Russia. Even today, historians debate the wisdom of escape to Russia, because many Jews who went east were arrested and deported to Siberia, where they died of hunger, disease and exhaustion. On the other hand, it seems that the majority of Polish Jews who survived the war were among those who crossed over to the Soviet Union before the border closed in December 1939.³⁵

³⁵ Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of the Holocaust* (New York: Pergamon, 1988), 36. Deciding whether to move to Soviet-occupied Poland or to stay in German-occupied Poland must certainly have been one of the most difficult choices one could face. In hindsight, it is clear that the odds of survival were better on the Soviet side. Despite brutal treatment, harsh living and working conditions, most Polish Jews who survived did so in the Soviet Union, not in Poland or Germany. Approximately 300,000 Polish Jews fled into Soviet-occupied Poland; about 180,000 survived and were repatriated at war's end. Only 50,000-70,000 Polish-Jewish survivors were found in Poland, in the Polish army, and in camps in Germany. Dawidowicz, *War*, 396-397.

However, when the choice had to be made, there was no hindsight. Past experience with Russians and Germans guided decisions. Hilberg provides some insight into the factors that influenced the decision to stay or flee. He comments "People do not voluntarily leave their homes for uncertain havens unless they are driven by an acute awareness of coming disaster." Hilberg, *Destruction*, 123. Many Jews did not realize the danger of staying under German rule. Their response was shaped by the Jewish view that "bad things came from Russia and good things from Germany." *Idem*, 123. The Jews considered Germany, not Russia, their traditional refuge; old Jews especially recalled that in World War I, the Germans had come as liberators. Despite the reports from Germany, despite Hitler's promise that war would mean "the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe," many Jews could not believe that the Germans now came as killers. *Idem*, 157. Thus, in October and November 1939, when the border between German-occupied and Soviet-occupied Poland was still open, many Polish Jews actually moved to the German zone. *Idem*, 123.

Gilbert also gives a sense of the confusion and turmoil that prevailed in those dark days.

"[Some] Jews...fled eastward from German-occupied Poland, across the River Bug, to the Soviet side. There, to their bewilderment, they met Polish Jews fleeing westward, desperate to escape the perils of Communist rule, and hoping that, as had been true in the First World War, German rule might prove less burdensome." Gilbert, *Second World War*, 23.

Poignant expression of the catastrophic consequences of these Jewish preconceptions is found in the testimony of Anti-Partisan Chief von dem Bach. Hilberg, *Destruction*, 293. Speaking of the accusation that Jews were Bolsheviks, von dem Bach testified

So the German army returned to Siedlce. Germany soon annexed part of western Poland and in early October Hitler established the General Government in the rest of occupied Poland.³⁶ Headed by Governor General Hans Frank, the civil administration of the General Government imposed increasingly onerous restrictions on the Jewish population. On October 25, Frank ordered compulsory forced labor for all Jewish males aged fourteen to sixty.³⁷ On November 23 all Jews over the age of ten were ordered to wear identifying armbands.³⁸ Ida describes the worsening situation and its effect on her parents, especially her father, as the family kept him at home to save him from the labor roundups and beatings.³⁹ She, who saw herself as timid and shy, became her father's liaison to his customers and suppliers in Warsaw, bringing shoes to be sold for desperately needed cash, returning with leather to work into shoes.⁴⁰ The forced inactivity took its toll on her father; he was cheered only when he felt useful. She cites one example

It was not so, as the anti-Semites say, that they were friendly to the Soviets. That is the most appalling misconception of all. The Jews in the old Poland, who were never communistic in their sympathies, were, throughout the area of the Bug eastward, more afraid of Bolshevism than of the Nazis. This was insanity. They could have been saved. There were people among them who had much to lose, business people; they didn't want to leave. In addition there was love of home and their experience with pogroms in Russia. After the first anti-Jewish actions of the Germans, they thought now the wave was over and so they walked back to their undoing. Idem, 294.

³⁶ Dawidowicz, *War*, 394. The General Government included 39,000 square miles of German-occupied Poland. Another 32,000 square miles of Polish territory were incorporated into the Greater Reich.

³⁷ Gilbert, *Second World War*, 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 28. The armband had to be white, at least four inches wide, with a Jewish star. It had to be worn on the right sleeve of both inner and outer garments.

³⁹ "Random seizures of Jews off the streets and even from their homes for forced labor began spontaneously... long before... Frank issued [the] decree making forced labor compulsory for all Jews aged fourteen through sixty." Jews were forced to do all kinds of exhausting work. Sometimes they were allowed to return home at the end of the day, but often they were kept for longer periods and not allowed to contact their families. Dawidowicz, *War*, 202.

⁴⁰ This arrangement was apparently not unusual. In the ghetto "[p]arents and children divided responsibilities for maintaining the household, apportioning tasks as the hardships of the occasion demanded, no longer in accordance with fixed familial roles." *Ibid.*, 220.

of his efforts to be active—his successful negotiation of an exchange of residences with a Volksdeutsch, a Pole of German ancestry. The Germans had begun creating ghettos in October 1939, but the major Polish ghettos were not created until 1940, Lodz in April, Warsaw in October.⁴¹ News of the ghettos traveled, and the Jews of Siedlce must have anticipated that one would be established in their town soon. Ida's family lived in an apartment uncomfortably situated across from German headquarters. Assuming that the ghetto would be located in one of the poor sections of town,⁴² her father offered to exchange quarters with an engineer who lived on the probable site of the ghetto. His foresightedness enabled the family to live in a decent house, to take a few things with them, and most importantly, to choose the people who would live in the house with them. Thus they avoided the frenzied uprooting Ida describes on the day the Jews were herded into the ghetto. One unanticipated happy consequence of her father's foresight was that he began to work for one of their lodgers, a woman who owned a flour mill. Since the Germans needed the mill, he received a pass stating that he was part of the war effort. The pass allowed him to walk to the mill without worrying about getting caught and the work made him feel useful. Unfortunately, on the day when Siedlce's Jews were rounded up for extermination, Ida's father reported to the Umschlagplatz, the collecting point, thinking this pass would protect him from whatever unknown fate awaited.

⁴¹ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 79. The Cracow ghetto was established in March 1941, Lublin and Radom in April 1941. Most Jews in the General Government were in ghettos by the end of 1941. *Idem*, 79.

⁴² The ghetto were usually located in dilapidated parts of town already densely populated by Jews. *Ibid.*, 83. Sometimes they were situated in outlying areas that lacked lighting, sewage and sanitation facilities. Dawidowicz, *War*, 208.

The Siedlce ghetto was established in August 1941 and sealed October 1, 1941.⁴³

Ida describes the awful conditions—the lack of food, the overcrowding, the poor sanitary conditions, the resulting disease and death. She recalls the morning hunts for workers and the terrible treatment of those caught for the work gangs. But the Siedlce ghetto was not unique. All over Poland, Jews were crowded into ghettos, jammed into small areas, forced to share small dilapidated apartments and given no supplies. Plumbing and sewage facilities were overwhelmed and soon broke down. There was little soap or fuel; sometimes there was no electricity. The filth and overcrowding produced an epidemic of typhus; tuberculosis, dysentery, and influenza also flourished. Food was totally inadequate. German occupation authorities allotted Jews only half the amount allotted to other civilians in the occupied Eastern territories.⁴⁴

As horrible as it was, the ghetto was only a way-station on the path to a more terrible fate. Only a year later, on August 22, 1942, the Germans surrounded the ghetto and ordered everyone to report to the Umschlagplatz. Another moment of agonizing decision-making had arrived, as people tried to decide whether to report or to hide. Ida's memoir indicates that people suspected they were going to their death, not to some new life in the east. After all, Siedlce was only about fifty miles to the east of Warsaw, where deportations had begun in July, and it was not far from Treblinka, where the Germans

⁴³ Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Siedlce." A photograph of the order establishing the Siedlce ghetto, dated August 25, 1941, can be seen in Zosa Szajkowski, An Illustrated Sourcebook on the Holocaust (New York: Ktav, 1979), 69.

⁴⁴ Dawidowicz, War, 209-210; Hilberg, Destruction, 94-95. The ration provided to Jews in the Warsaw ghetto in 1941 was 220 calories a person, about fifteen percent of the amount needed to keep someone alive and able to work. Ringelblum, Relations, 75, f.n. 16. Clearly, if the Jews had relied only on the rations delivered to them by the German authorities, they would have starved more quickly than they did. Nazi hopes for their quick demise were thwarted by Jewish ingenuity in organizing smuggling and bartering. Jews traded clothes, shoes, jewelry and other personal belongings for food or money. They smuggled out goods made in the ghetto, while Poles smuggled in food and raw materials. Despite the ingenuity of the ghetto inhabitants, however, at least a half million Jews – approximately 20% of Polish Jewry – died in the ghettos of starvation, disease, harsh forced labor and random acts of violence. Dawidowicz, War, 397; Tec, When Light, 21.

had built one of their notorious death camps.⁴⁵ Siedlce was on a direct train line to Treblinka, and Ida mentions that some escapees from Treblinka even came to Siedlce and told people what was happening there. But people either could not believe them or saw no hope of escape.⁴⁶ So, on August 22, people reported to the Umschlagplatz. Some people, weary of the terrible situation and tired of life, went with no illusions and no hope. Others went, still clinging to the hope that they would be selected for work. Some thought they could bribe their way out. Still others decided to hide. Ida and David hid. When they emerged from their hiding place, they found themselves among approximately 2000 survivors of the community. A marker in Siedlce says that 17,000 Jews were shot at the Umschlagplatz or deported from it to death at Treblinka.

⁴⁵ The Nazis built four death camps on Polish soil – Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. Unlike the concentration camps, where some people were selected for slave labor, at these four camps almost everyone was killed on arrival, gassed in vans or in gas chambers. Very few were kept alive for work. All the death camps were located in remote areas, so the killings could be carried out secretly, and on railway lines, so the victims could be brought in by trains. Chelmno, the first death camp, went into operation on December 8, 1941, when seven hundred Jews from Kolo, Poland, were packed into a van and gassed on the drive from Chelmno to a nearby forest. Gilbert, *Second World War*, 274. Belzec became operational on March 17, 1942. Gilbert, *Atlas*, 90. It was followed by Sobibor in April and Treblinka in July 1942. Gilbert, *Second World War*, 317; Hilberg, *Destruction*, 229. Most of Warsaw's Jews and Siedlce's Jews were deported to Treblinka, which was located in a thick pine forest about sixty miles northeast of Warsaw. Abram Sachar, *The Redemption of the Unwanted* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1983), 32-33. In the seven weeks following July 22, 1942, when the mass deportations from the Warsaw ghetto began, 250,000 Jews were killed at Treblinka. "[I]t was the largest, swiftest slaughter of a single community, Jewish or non-Jewish, in the Second World War." Gilbert, *Second World War*, 343-344. Hilberg estimates that 150,000 Jews were killed at Chelmno, 550,000 at Belzec, 200,000 at Sobibor, and 750,000 at Treblinka. Unlike Gilbert, Hilberg counts Auschwitz and Majdanek as death camps. Gilbert distinguishes them from the other four because at Auschwitz and Majdanek some people were selected for slave labor. While their living and working conditions were so dreadful that many did not live long, at the other four camps most deportees were immediately exterminated. Approximately 50,000 Jews were killed at Majdanek and one million at Auschwitz. Hilberg, *Destruction*, 239.

⁴⁶ There are numerous accounts of escapees who came back to their towns to report on the horrors they had witnessed, only to be met by incredulity. Dawidowicz tells of two Jews who escaped Chelmno and reached Warsaw in December 1941 or early in 1942. They told the community leaders about the gassings but the leaders thought they were deranged and didn't disseminate the information because they thought it implausible. Dawidowicz, *War*, 294.

A few survivors of the mass shootings at Ponary, near Vilna, met the same response. When they managed to return to Vilna and recount what they had seen, people did not believe them because their stories were so horrible. Doctors at the ghetto hospital thought they were demented. Idem, 285.

In the four months that followed, Ida and David and Ida's brother Wit worked with the various work crews organized by the Germans, but as the December 31 deadline for General Government Poland to be "Judenrein"—clean of Jews—approached, the Jewish work crews were gradually eliminated and the opportunities for work diminished.⁴⁷ They were unable to find secure long-term hiding places and decided the only choice left was to go to Germany. Many young Poles were going there, some voluntarily, some forcibly shipped, and they thought they might have a chance to survive there where no one knew them. Ida's memoir tells how they organized their escape and successfully managed to exit Poland despite her fears that David's "Jewish appearance" would betray him. These fears reveal how deeply popular stereotypes had penetrated even the Jews themselves. In planning their departure, Ida did not worry about herself and her brother passing as Poles. They were fair, they had gone to school with Poles and knew their prayers and their ways. But David was another matter. Ida worried that he would never pass for a Pole because he looked and acted "Jewish." She does not define this precisely but mentions that he had dark hair and was skinny, in contrast to his older brother Moshe, who was tall and blond and "didn't look Jewish." Post-war studies of rescuers confirm the validity of Ida's concerns and the prevalence of these popular stereotypes. Rescuers were more inclined to help a blond, blue-eyed Jewish woman who could pass for Aryan, especially if she had false papers, than a Jewish man, especially if he spoke with an accent and "looked Jewish," i.e., had dark hair and eyes, a beard and a big nose.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ On July 19, 1942, Heinrich Himmler, head of the S.S., ordered the General Government to be totally cleansed of Jews by December 31, 1942. Gilbert, *Second World War*, 343.

⁴⁸ Fogelman called this a "hierarchy of desirability." Fogelman, *Conscience*, 139. In her study of rescuers, she found that the physical characteristics of the person seeking help definitely influenced the

Arrival in Germany did not end their travails, however; it was merely the start of a new set. David and Ida worked first at the Henschelwerke, an armaments factory in Kassel. Living conditions there were abominable; the Germans did not feel obliged to waste precious resources on foreign laborers, especially Poles and Russians whom they considered inferior races. People were crowded into primitive barracks with little or no heat and the food was barely sufficient to provide the energy needed for work.⁴⁹

likelihood of getting help. Idem, 61.

Jews in the Warsaw ghetto who contemplated passing as Poles or hiding in the Polish sector were well aware of these stereotypes and feared being identified by their nose, hair and eyes. While they could do little about their noses and eyes, many tried to bleach their hair. Unfortunately, agents checked roots so this didn't help. Ringelblum, Relations, 103. Generally it was easier for women to pass than men because Jewish men were circumcised at a time when circumcision was not common among Christians.

Nechama Tec's study of survivors and rescuers confirms that Jews who looked Polish, or at least not Jewish, passed as Christians more easily than Jews who conformed to the Polish stereotype. Tec, When Light, 35. Of the survivors she interviewed, 79% of the women and 56% of the men looked Polish. Idem, 213. What did the stereotypical Jew look like? Again, he had dark skin and eyes, dark curly hair, and a long nose. Idem, 35.

Physical characteristics, however, were not the only determinants of success in hiding or passing. Cultural and behavioral traits could also betray one's Jewishness. Assimilated Jews had a better chance of passing than unassimilated Jews, but fewer than ten percent of Polish Jews could be considered assimilated. Idem, 37. Many Polish Jews spoke Yiddish rather than Polish; those who spoke Polish often could be identified by their intonation, vocabulary, and expressions. Their gestures and body movements were distinctive. These traits made the Jews highly visible, so visible that, according to one estimate, "eighty percent of the Jews were recognizable to Poles." Heller, Edge, 69.

Those Jews who overcame these obstacles and succeeded in looking and acting Polish could be foiled by questions on Catholic practices and prayers. The Jews who had the best chance of surviving by passing were young, spoke Polish without a Jewish accent, felt comfortable with Poles and looked Polish, or at least not Jewish. Most came from professional or well-to-do business families. Tec, When Light, 38-39. Given their years of education in the state schools, hearing Catholic prayers and being with Polish peers, Ida and her brother clearly had a better chance of passing successfully than David.

⁴⁹ Foreign workers were generally poorly treated in Germany, as evidenced by letters home reporting long working hours, poor food, housing and clothing, and little medical care. However, Polish and Russian workers were treated worse than workers from occupied western countries because they were considered an inferior race. Nazi racial theories thus came into conflict with Nazi war needs. Improving the treatment of these workers might have increased their productivity, but eliminating these "racially underpinned differences in treatment" might have undermined Nazi ideology. Ulrich Herbert, Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich, trans. William Templar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 295.

While Russians were branded as Bolsheviks, the Poles could not be so easily dismissed. Traditionally, many Poles had gone to Germany as seasonal agricultural workers, and their relations with their German employers had been satisfactory. The Nazis' need for labor quickly led them to look toward Poland, which they saw as "an enormous...labor camp." Idem, 108. In January 1940 the regime asked Governor General Frank to send one million agricultural and industrial workers to the Reich. At first some Poles volunteered, but as reports of living and working conditions in Germany streamed back, fewer volunteers came forward. Possibly contributing to this decline in volunteers were Nazi decrees issued March 8, 1940, which "[codified] the inferior social position of the Polish workers" and reinforced the notion of the superiority of the German master race. These decrees required the Poles to wear an identifying badge and barred them from

Nevertheless, they thought they had escaped the worst until other Jews with false papers were discovered and executed. Ida's fears seemed borne out when they learned that David was suspected of being Jewish. Shaken by these occurrences, they decided to try to escape to Switzerland. This attempt failed, but fortunately, the Germans did not discover they were Jewish. Because the Germans needed workers, they were spared execution and sent to work on a farm in Obervolkach, a village near the small town of Volkach.⁵⁰ Here they spent the last two years of the war, working alongside Poles, Russians, and French prisoners of war, helping Frau Englert keep the farm and flour mill going while Herr Englert was off at the front. On the farm they worked long hours and slept in a hayloft, but their greatest fear was that their Jewish identity would be discovered. Ida gave birth to a daughter but was forced to surrender her to a German couple in the nearby village so that she could keep working.⁵¹ An occasional glimpse at the local newspaper and reports

German bars and restaurants, public transport, and German social, cultural and religious events. To discourage fraternization, Nazi posters reminded Germans that "The Poles can never be your comrade!...Never forget that you belong to a master race." By mid-April, only 210,000 Poles had gone to Germany, and the Nazis had to resort to quotas, forcible seizures, and other coercive measures to get the workers they needed. Idem, 71-82.

Nazi ideology not only influenced the treatment of foreign workers, it was partly responsible for the need to import the workers. While all German men were employed at the start of the war, 3.5 million German women were unemployed. Idem, 41. Nazi ideology opposed the employment of women, so officials had to look for other sources of workers, or cut back on production, or reduce the size of the military. Although many regarded the use of foreign labor as a "serious ideological concession," they obviously preferred this option to the alternatives. Idem, 64. But to reinforce their racial theories, they had to keep the foreign workers in their place. Nazi war needs required productive workers, Nazi racial theories demanded incompetent, lazy, malingering laborers.

⁵⁰ The number of absconding foreign workers increased as 1942 progressed, as Allied bombing raids worsened living conditions and increased the chaos in the camps and factories. Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 340. In fall 1942 the Germans began to organize manhunts and to check trains, roads and bridges for fugitive workers. Those who were caught were supposed to be returned to their former workplace, but this rarely happened, either because the worker would not reveal his past identity or because the German would simply hand him over to the nearest labor office for redeployment. Idem, 343-344.

⁵¹ Originally, pregnant foreign workers were sent back to their native country. When this practice led to an increase in pregnancies, especially in Polish and Eastern workers, the Nazis concluded that the workers were getting pregnant intentionally so they could return home. At the end of 1942 the government decided to change its policy. Pregnant foreign women would no longer be sent home. Children of "good racial stock" would be bought up as Germans in special homes; children of "inferior racial stock" would be placed in nursing homes for foreign children. Conditions in these homes were poor and many of these children died. Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 270-272.

on the progress of the war from the French prisoners of war who worked nearby encouraged Ida and David to feel that they would survive the war, but there were still some close calls. David barely escaped being sent to work on the West Wall, where workers fell like flies from bombs and miserable treatment,⁵² and then he lost part of a finger in an accident at the farm. This accident turned out to be fortunate; David was taken to a small hospital in Volkach run by nuns and the nuns kept him there several weeks. He helped them in their garden but the work was easy and the stay gave him a much needed respite. Soon after he returned to the Englert farm, American troops began to approach the area, and rumors began to circulate among the foreign workers that the Germans planned to kill them to prevent them from talking. Ida and David began hiding again and finally joined other workers crossing the Main River in a desperate attempt to get to the American side.

Once across the Main, however, the group discovered that they had to move on because they were in the midst of a battle zone. David and Ida had recovered their child and they began walking, looking for food and shelter. In their search they were soon joined by some of the millions of foreigners who had been working in Germany, in

In March 1943, new regulations were adopted which allowed pregnant Polish and Eastern workers to request an abortion. Idem, 270. As the memoir relates, Ida's employer took her to the village doctor to get an abortion, but he refused to perform one. When the child was born, the employer took her and placed her in the home of a German couple. Apparently, no one was able to detect that the child was not of "good racial stock." Consistent with Nazi racial ideology, the infants of Western workers were only placed in German homes if the mother consented; children of Polish or Eastern workers could be taken away without the mother's consent. Idem, 271.

⁵² The West Wall, or Siegfried Line, as the Allies called it, was a band of concrete fortifications which ran from Germany's border with Switzerland to north of Aachen on the border with Holland. The three-mile deep band consisted of hundreds of pill boxes, troop shelters, command posts, and pyramidal concrete projections called dragon's teeth. Charles B. MacDonald, *The Mighty Endeavor: American Armed Forces in the European Theater in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 333. After the Normandy invasion, Hitler decided the West Wall could serve as a last line of defense to slow or stop the Allied advance and ordered it repaired and reinforced. Idem, 333-334.

factories, on farms, in labor camps and concentration camps.⁵³ Ida tells how they went first to Prosselheim, where the Dutch prisoners had set up a temporary feeding center, and then to Schweinfurt, site of one of Germany's main ball-bearing factories, where the liberated Russian workers were wildly carousing.⁵⁴ From Schweinfurt they were brought to Wildflecken, a former S.S. camp that the army converted into a camp for the foreigners.⁵⁵ They thought that they had arrived in paradise because they had their own room, with hot water and electricity. Wildflecken was soon taken over by the UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, which ran the displaced persons camps until June 1947, when the IRO, the International Refugee Organization, took over.⁵⁶ David became one of the supply officers at the camp, helping the UNRRA people care for the thousands of displaced persons who came in and went out of Wildflecken. Ida recalls some of the incidents that occurred in the camp, including the stoning of the town mayor when poison was discovered in the camp's milk. She mentions the amazement she and David felt when Jewish survivors of the concentration camps were brought in. Their arrival prompted David and Ida to reveal their true identity to the camp officer and then to leave Wildflecken to work in another camp set up solely for

⁵³ There were 7,615,970 foreign workers officially registered in the Reich in August 1944. They included 1.9 million prisoners of war and 5.7 million civilian workers. The largest contingents were the 1.3 million French, 1.7 million Poles, and 2.8 million Soviet citizens. More than half of the Polish and Soviet civilian workers were female. Foreigners comprised about fifty percent of the workers in agriculture and in the munitions industry. Herbert, Foreign Workers, 1.

⁵⁴ Schweinfurt was the target of three major bombing attacks. The first, on August 17, 1943, inflicted serious damage and killed 565 Germans and 86 foreign workers. Gilbert, Second World War, 453. The second, on October 14, 1943, caused little damage to the factory but cost the lives of one hundred American airmen. Idem, 467. The third attack came on February 23, 1944, during a week of major strikes on German aircraft and ball-bearing factories. Idem, 500-501.

⁵⁵ Wildflecken was one of the largest camps for displaced persons, housing 15,000 refugees at some periods, and containing sixty blockhouses and twelve kitchens within its twenty-five mile perimeter. Wyman, DP, 43. In its former life as an S.S. training center, it had been so secret that its name could not be put on any map after 1938. Kathryn Hulme, The Wild Place (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1953), 6.

⁵⁶ Wyman, DP, 74-75.

Jewish survivors. This arrangement did not work out as expected and the UNRRA then moved them to the city of Fulda.

The four years that elapsed from Germany's defeat in May 1945 to their departure from Germany in June 1949 are marked by some joyous events—the birth of a son in February 1946, reunions with Ida's brother Wit and David's sister Sarah—but overall Ida does not portray them as happy years. Many DPs were quickly and easily repatriated, but a significant number refused to return home. Balts, Ukrainians, and Poles were especially reluctant to go back to their native lands because they feared Soviet control.⁵⁷ They did not want to stay in the DP camps but it was difficult to find countries that would admit them. Many of the Western European countries were unwilling to take them in, as their economies and cities were still devastated from the war. Many of the Jewish DPs wanted to go to Palestine but Great Britain refused to lift its limits on immigration.⁵⁸ Others wanted to go to the United States, but the United States had restrictive quotas.⁵⁹ Countries

⁵⁷ By September 1945 most refugees had gone home, but 1 million Poles, 170,000 Balts, 100,000 Yugoslavs and 54,000 Soviet citizens remained in Western Europe. *Ibid.*, 69. Some of these DPs did not wish to return home because they disliked Communism; others feared retribution for collaborating with the Nazis. For Poles, a 1946 UNRRA report stated, "the single most important deterrent is a fear of the Soviet Union and a distaste for what is believed to be a growing tendency toward Communism and Totalitarianism in Poland." The Soviet Union's establishment of a puppet regime in Poland and its arrest of Polish resistance leaders did not reassure these anxious Poles. *Idem*, 79. Only discouragement with life in Germany, reduction of activities in the DP camps, and incentives such as food packages finally persuaded many of these DPs to go back to their native lands. Almost one million were repatriated from November 1, 1945, to June 30, 1947; an additional 54,000 were repatriated in the next three years. *Idem*, 74-75.

⁵⁸ The White Paper, issued by Great Britain on May 17, 1939, "called for the creation of a Jewish National Home in an independent Palestinian state." It restricted land transfers to Jews and limited Jewish immigration to 15,000 annually for the next five years. The White Paper reflected Great Britain's new security concerns and concomitant interest in gaining Arab support. The British could take Jewish support against the Nazis for granted, but they needed to win over the Arabs. The White Paper produced great dismay among Jews who saw it as a betrayal of promises made in the Balfour Declaration. Issued at a time when Jews desperately needed to escape Europe, the White Paper slammed shut another exit. Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 4th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 147.

⁵⁹ The immigration law passed in 1924, the Johnson Act, established an immigration quota of 2% of the number of foreign-born persons of each nationality resident in the United States in 1890. That year was intentionally chosen because it pre-dated the arrival of large numbers of Italians, Slavs, and Russian Jews. The act thus foreclosed the possibility of immigration for the millions of Jews caught in Eastern Europe and the

like Canada and Australia sent commissions to the camps to select DPs who might meet their need for strong farm workers and lumberjacks, but most of the Jews had not been farm workers or lumberjacks before the war and now were in no shape to do hard physical labor.⁶⁰ They watched in dismay as Poles and Latvians who had helped the Germans were selected. They found amusement in some of the schemes DPs concocted to get visas. They organized cultural events and social activities, they married and had children, but as the months passed, discouragement set in. Ida felt that no one wanted the Jews; as she put it, they had suffered the most, but no one wanted them. She and David realized that they were lucky to be together, to have their children, but they also saw that a family was more difficult to resettle than a young single person. It was a time that called for more agonizing decisions, decisions that divided families.

In 1948 the state of Israel was created,⁶¹ and Sarah and her husband decided to go there to join another sister who had survived in Russia. Wit moved from Poland to Germany to Holland and then, despairing of ever getting into the United States, decided to take his chances in Poland. Ida and David considered going to Israel and then decided against it. They began corresponding with an uncle in Canada who was willing to help them emigrate there. Then, one day in May 1949, while David was in Frankfurt visiting agencies on business, he was offered the opportunity to come to the United States. Congress had passed the Displaced Persons Act in June 1948, allowing 202,000 D.P.'s to

Soviet Union. Howard M. Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1958), 313-314.

⁶⁰ Most countries wanted young, single, strong, non-Jewish males. Australia was willing to accept families if they were not Jewish. Dinnerstein, America, 199. Rabbi Philip Bernstein, President Truman's advisor on Jewish Affairs, found that countries were generally willing to take in very small numbers of DPs and wanted people skilled in forestry, mining, and farming, areas in which few Jewish DPs had any experience. Sachar, Redemption, 171.

⁶¹ The U.N. General Assembly officially approved the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish, on November 29, 1947. Smith, Palestine, 195. Israel proclaimed its statehood on May 14, 1948, when the British mandate ended. Idem, 200.

enter the United States in the next two years.⁶² Hardly believing this good fortune, they quickly made their preparations. Prior to leaving, they returned to Obervolkach to see the Hoffmans, who had kept their daughter during the war, and then on June 6, 1949, the family sailed from Bremerhaven to the new world. Almost ten years had passed since Ida and David's lives had been so rudely interrupted by German warplanes.

The memoirs of survivors often raise, explicitly or implicitly, the issue of how much survival was attributable to luck and chance, and how much to resourcefulness and courage. While one might assume that survivors uniformly would be tempted to vaunt their virtues, the survivors themselves are not consistent. Some downplay the importance of resourcefulness and stress the importance of luck; others do the opposite. Ida's memoir credits both. In speaking of some events, like the bombing of Siedlce, she says that surviving was just a fluke, as no one knew what to do or where to go. Later, speaking of hiding from the Germans, Ida again credits luck. "Sometimes people stayed in a cellar and the Germans never opened the door to look in. Others stayed in cellars and were found because the Germans saw the cellar and opened the door and looked in." (p.188) It was only luck that kept Ida and David and Wit from being rounded up and sent with the other survivors to Gesiborki. Luck also mattered in finding Poles who were willing to help. There were such Poles, Ida says, but one had to have the luck to find them. Ida's memoir is replete with people who disappoint and betray, and with others who risk their own lives to help. An old school friend who spent much time at her house turned out to be a "rat." Another Pole who knew her family turned her away when she came to his house seeking help. Ida says that when people went into the ghetto, they gave their possessions to people they trusted for safekeeping. A business associate whom the

⁶² Hulme, *Wild Place*, 223-224.

Yomtovs and other Jews entrusted with jewelry, furs, and money was supposed to give them money when they needed it, but never did anything for anyone.⁶³ "People you trusted and you thought you knew—businessmen and friends—people you thought would help you—took advantage....On the other hand, sometimes in unexpected places you met somebody who helped you." (p.153-154) It was luck that brought Ida to the Polish woman—a woman that she did not even know—who took her in, hid her and David and helped them leave Siedlce. Although Ida says that this woman probably helped them escape because she wanted them gone, nevertheless, she did not turn Ida away, she took messages from Ida to David and Wit, she got David the baptismal certificate he needed to establish his Catholic identity and she kept Ida until Ida heard from David and was able to leave. It was also luck that brought Ida together with a Pole from Radom who warned her that David was suspected of being Jewish and helped her and David escape the work camp at Kassel. One might even say that it was a strange kind of luck that David had an accident which sent him to a hospital where he was able to regain some strength. And it was luck that neither David nor Ida nor their daughter was killed as the Allied bombs fell on Germany.

Luck or chance also played a more subtle role, as it does in all our lives, for it determines what family we are born into and with that, assigns looks, resources, intelligence. Ida had the luck to be born into a fairly assimilated family, to be educated in a Polish school, to look Polish. Consequently, she spoke Polish well and had Polish friends who could later help her get false papers. David had more difficulty passing as a

⁶³ Nazi decrees and searches of Jewish apartments forced Jews to give their belongings to Christian acquaintances, clients, or partners for safekeeping. "It usually turned out very badly for the Jews.... In an overwhelming majority of cases, perhaps ninety-five percent, neither goods nor personal belongings were returned." Ringelblum, *Relations*, 77. In some cases, the desire to keep the belongings actually led the Pole to denounce the Jew.

Pole because his family was less assimilated and he looked Jewish. His family also had contacts with Poles through their wholesale business, but those contacts did not help them escape. Ultimately, it was a Polish woman neither of them knew and a prison guard who knew Ida's father who helped them leave Poland.

Post-war studies of rescuers confirm just how lucky Ida and David were to find the people who hid them and helped them leave Poland. Rescuers had to have great courage, fortitude and resourcefulness, as they placed themselves and their families in great danger. In Poland anyone found hiding or helping a Jew was shot or hung.⁶⁴ Consequently, while there may have been many people hostile to the Nazis or sympathetic to Jews, these feelings only rarely translated into help. One could easily be betrayed by neighbors who didn't like Jews or who wanted the rewards the Germans offered for finding Jews. Blackmailers were plentiful and alert to signs of suspicious activity. In a house with no indoor plumbing or washing machine, one could arouse suspicion simply by emptying out chamberpots too often or hanging too many items out on the line to dry. Food was scarce and only officially registered people could get the ration cards needed to obtain it. Yet despite the risks and the enormous strains, some people did help. The difficulty lay in determining who would do so.

Studies of rescuers divide between those that conclude that rescuers did not share any special characteristics and those that find that the rescuers did have certain common traits. Those in the first camp suggest that Jews could not easily identify rescuers because of this lack of identifiable shared traits. Those in the second camp imply that Jews might have been able to predict who would help because rescuers shared certain characteristics.

⁶⁴ A decree ordering the death sentence for any Christian Pole who knowingly helped a Jew hide or move out of a ghetto was issued by Governor Frank on October 15, 1941. Tec, *When Light*, 22. The decree was taken seriously, and many Poles were executed along with the Jews they helped.

In her study of rescuers, Conscience and Courage, Eva Fogelman states “there is no single set of attributes that will predict helping behavior. Once a ‘helping’ type of person becomes aware of the need for help, often subtle elements of the situation play predominant roles in determining whether the individual will intervene....”⁶⁵ Factors that influenced the likelihood of helping were the availability of resources, like a safe hideout, the attitude of family, and the physical appearance of the person seeking help.⁶⁶ Despite her disclaimer about predictive attributes, Fogelman was able to categorize rescuers as either moral-religious, Judeophilic, ideological, or concerned professionals. Moral-religious rescuers were motivated by the need to act in accordance with their conscience.⁶⁷ An old man who hid David and several other Jewish men under a platform scale and brought them bread and water at night typifies this group. While he did not offer long-term assistance, he did what he could because he didn’t want to have the deaths of these men on his conscience. Judeophiles generally felt a special connection to individual Jews or an affinity for Jews as a group.⁶⁸ The elderly couple who bought David and Ida the train tickets to Warsaw and saw them safely to the station were moved to help by the affection they felt for a particular Jew, Ida’s father, for whom the man had worked. Ideological rescuers were motivated by opposition to the Nazi regime and tended to be part of networks.⁶⁹ The woman who hid Ida and David seems to have been connected to the underground, as she took Ida to an underground photographer to have a

⁶⁵ Fogelman, Conscience, 58.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

picture made and was able to procure a baptismal certificate for David. Ida also thought that she was hiding another Jewish woman in a separate room. Despite her difficult situation, she braved her husband's anger to take in David when she did not have any extra room for him and could only offer to let him lie in the bed with the covers drawn over him. The fourth group, concerned professionals, like doctors, nurses, diplomats, did not figure significantly in Ida's story,⁷⁰ though she does mention a non-Jewish doctor who treated her mother-in-law when she was dying of cancer at a time when it was illegal for non-Jews to treat Jews.

Using Fogelman's categories, one could say that a Jew who needed help was well-advised to seek out a person of high moral fiber, a Pole sympathetic to Jews, a member of the underground, or a professional. But unless the Jew actually knew the Pole, he would find it difficult to determine if the Pole fit into these categories.

Nechama Tec's seminal work, When Light Pierced the Darkness, also grapples with the question of whether rescuers had common characteristics that enabled them to undertake and persevere in this hazardous work. Tec examined various factors to see if they could predict helping behavior. She found that neither social class, nor political involvement, nor religious conviction were helpful predictors. The rescuers she studied were socially heterogeneous, largely apolitical and irreligious. Even friendship did not emerge as a significant predictor of rescue; it motivated only 36% of the rescuers;⁷¹ a majority of survivors said they were helped by strangers.⁷² Many survivors reported

⁷⁰ Ibid., 159.

⁷¹ Tec, When Light, 132.

⁷² Ibid., 129.

asking friends first, being turned down, and then getting help from strangers.⁷³ Ida's experience was similar; she was sometimes helped by friends but sometimes disappointed by them. The couple that kept her a few days and gave her a brief respite from the ghetto were David's friends, owners of a small store, members of the underground like the woman who hid her and David. We know nothing more of their social class, political views, or religious beliefs. The elderly guard who helped them leave Siedlce was a friend of Ida's father and also quite religious. But other friends and acquaintances turned her away. Tec found that the principal motivation for helping was compassion; 95% of the rescuers said they were motivated by compassion and 81% of the survivors felt that compassion was the rescuer's primary motivation.⁷⁴

But at a time when Nazi decrees made helping Jews a crime punishable by death and in a place where the atmosphere had long been hostile to Jews, compassion could easily have been overridden by fear. What gave the rescuers the courage to overcome their fears and to risk the very real dangers? Tec concluded that rescuers tended to be independent, self-reliant individuals who had a long-standing commitment to helping the needy, and a universalistic perception of the needy that overshadowed all their other attributes.⁷⁵ Loosely integrated into their community, they were free to pursue their personal values and express their generous impulses. Tec and Fogelman thus wind up in different camps, the former concluding that there are certain attributes shared by rescuers, the latter more reluctant to acknowledge such common traits. But the shared attributes identified by Tec would not have helped the desperate Jew determine who to approach

⁷³ Ibid., 129.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 180.

for help. Like Fogelman's categories, these attributes were not superficially evident; only a Jew who already knew a Pole well could know if he possessed these attributes. Ultimately, one hoped for luck.

Luck was critical, but it would be remiss to underestimate the importance of resourcefulness and courage. While one must always be aware of a memoirist's temptation to make himself the hero of his own story, one must also be willing to give him some credit. At various critical times, especially in the difficult months that followed the liquidation of the ghetto, Ida was able to concentrate and recall people who might help. Toward the end of November 1942, as the deadline for General Government Poland to be free of Jews approached and as the situation was becoming increasingly desperate, she remembered that months earlier, a sister of her brother-in-law had hidden on the third floor of a certain house in Siedlce. She was able to recall the location of the house and went there; this was the woman who finally helped her and David leave Siedlce. On two occasions, Ida risked denunciation by walking across town to meet people who she thought might help her; people who knew her saw her and averted their gaze but did not turn her in. When one man told her to leave, she insisted that he speak to her, telling him that she had nothing to lose, but that he had lots to lose. As she put it, her "only weapons were chutzpah and blackmail." (p. 193) Ida and David also showed resourcefulness in planning their escapes from Siedlce and Kassel. They left Siedlce at dark to minimize the chance of detection. Before leaving Kassel, they invented a story so that if they were stopped, they would say the same thing. They pretended not to speak German so that the Germans would feel free to speak in front of them. At one point during an interrogation, a German officer told Ida in German that there was bread in the next room and if she

wanted to eat, she could go get it. Suspecting a trick, Ida didn't move. Finally, they maintained two separate false identities under the most trying circumstances imaginable.

Neither luck nor resourcefulness would have sufficed, however, if Ida and David had not had a strong will to survive. In reading the memoir, one is struck by the trials they endured, the horrors they witnessed, and the losses they experienced. One wonders what made them go on. On only one occasion does Ida express a desire to end it all. Most of the time, she says, she was thinking of the next step to take. Despite the most harrowing circumstances, she and David did not give up. Emerging from hiding after the liquidation of the ghetto on August 22, 1942, having lost parents, friends, home, they could easily have walked up to a German soldier and revealed their identity. In the miserable days and weeks that followed, they could easily have decided on numerous occasions that life was definitely not worth living. Yet they struggled on, trying to avoid detection and death. What kept them going? It is hard to know. Certainly Judaism values life and does not condone suicide, but Ida was not a particularly religious person. They did not have children, at least not until September 1943, to whom they felt an obligation to survive. But they did have each other and perhaps, a simple determination not to be defeated by the Germans. Dorothy Parker is supposed to have said "Living well is the best revenge." In Ida's case, perhaps just living was the best revenge.

The Worst of Times: Recollections of a Polish-Jewish Survivor

I was born on December 29, 1914 in Siedlce, Poland, a small city about fifty miles east of Warsaw. Siedlce was a very pretty old city. It was the capital of the state so there were a lot of pretty buildings. The streets were cobblestone, and the sidewalks were planted with trees. It was very clean and there was lots of greenery. Twice a year all the property owners had to whitewash the gutters and paint all the trees halfway up the trunks. They didn't know about spraying trees so they painted them with lime so the worms wouldn't kill the trees.

There was a big park with the bishop's palace in it and a summer theater. During World War II the Germans tore the theater down and turned the park into a cemetery for German soldiers. There was also a small park with a big 14th century tower topped by a figure of Atlas. It was a fortress, but the city library was in it. It was a large library but you had to pay to go there so a lot of people didn't use it. The city had a round church where six streets converged. Originally it was a Russian Orthodox church, but later it became Roman Catholic. There was also a beautiful Gothic cathedral, which I think wasn't damaged in the war. There was a remnant of the old city wall with three bells hanging on it which the Germans blew up during the war because their tanks could not go through the city gates. They promised that after they won the war they would rebuild it.

About forty or forty-five thousand people lived in Siedlce, of whom fifteen to seventeen thousand were Jews.¹ Some of the Jews were doctors, some were lawyers, and a few had large stores and were well-to-do. The great majority of Jews were poor; they were tailors or shoemakers or had little grocery stores.²

The Jewish community had a great sense of unity. People knew each other so if somebody was in need people would get together to help. There was a special bank in which rich people deposited money that poor people could borrow without interest. These loans were not large but sometimes even fifty dollars helped. Poor people would go there and borrow money and pay it back when they could. One group of Jews was devoted to marrying off poor girls. They would assemble trousseaus and find husbands. Another group would walk around on Saturday mornings with a big basket and stand in the courtyards and call for people to donate bread. They would take this bread and distribute it to the poor. Another group organized a summer camp for children. There was a little Jewish hospital but only the poor went there because it wasn't great. If people really needed medical care they went to Warsaw. Some women would go there and bring chicken soup and food, or preserves to put into hot tea. There were a lot of groups like this. Sometimes they didn't even have formal names - people would just get together to help someone in need.

¹ In 1939 fifteen thousand Jews lived in Siedlce. They constituted about a third of the city's population. Jews resided in Siedlce from the middle of the sixteenth century. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Siedlce."

² In their poverty Siedlce's Jews resembled most of Poland's Jews. Contrary to Polish propaganda, which depicted Jews as controlling the economy, most Jews lived financially precarious existences as artisans, owners of small businesses or peddlers. Lucy Dawidowicz, The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 396; Yisrael Gutman, "Polish Antisemitism Between the Wars: An Overview," in The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars, ed. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz and Chone Shmeruk (Hanover, N.H.: University Press

We had a large Jewish orphanage. In 1933, when Hitler came to power, he expelled from Germany many Jews who were not born there.³ One day a train full of Jewish children came across the border; they were to be divided among several orphanages. My mother was one of the people who met this train, and they brought back about fourteen or fifteen children to our orphanage. The orphanage collected money, and once a year they had a big ball to raise money. They also got support from the Jewish community and the government. I used to go there often. The kids were well cared for. The home was very clean and they had nice food, nicer than some people ate at home. The children lived there and went to school until they were sixteen. At that point they were supposed to go out on their own, but for holidays and Sabbaths they would come back to the home to visit. Once a year my mother would go to Lodz, which was a textile center, and get the mills to give her material for the orphanage. From the cloth the women would make bed sheets and pillowcases and uniforms for the children.

We had many political parties in Poland - religious parties, liberal parties, radical parties, socialist parties.⁴ The Jews had the right to vote for representatives to the national parliament, the Sejm, but each Jewish community was also self-governed by a

of New England, 1989), 102.

³ I have not found any references to expulsions of Jews in 1933, but several historians mention the October 1938 expulsion of fifteen thousand Jews of Polish nationality who were living in Germany. These Jews were put in sealed trains at gunpoint and driven to the Polish-German border. Polish authorities refused to let them continue into Poland so the Jews had to stay in the border town Zbaszyn. This small town was completely unprepared to take care of them, so they were forced to live in deplorable conditions. Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 158-159.

⁴ In one year, 1925, Poland had ninety-two officially registered political parties. Nechama Tec, When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). 14. There were four main political movements - Socialists, Nationalists, Peasants, and Christian Democrats - but each of them had numerous offshoots and factions. To complicate matters further, Poland's national minorities each had their own parties. The sheer number of different competing parties made it difficult for any party to get a majority in the Sejm. Norman Davies, Heart of

little council, the Kehilla.⁵ The Kehilla collected taxes and paid the rabbi, the shamas⁶, and the kosher butcher. Most people were religious, but you didn't formally join a synagogue. The Kehilla had a big shul where everyone could go.⁷ The older people, who were more religious, went to shul. My father-in-law, for example, lived across the street from the big shul and went there every day in the morning and afternoon. The younger people did not go. There were a lot of shtibls, little rooms where small groups of men gathered to pray, but you were always welcome. There were many Hasidim, and they had their own shtibl.⁸

My father went to a shul called Shefland's shul, because a man named Shefland had donated the room. It was also called the "goyishe" shul because the people who went there were not very religious and went only on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and

Europe: The Past in Poland's Present (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 113.

⁵ In Poland the government gave Jewish communities a certain amount of autonomy. Each community elected a local council, a kehilla (plural: kehillot) which took care of the community's religious, educational and welfare needs. It maintained the synagogue, the ritual bath, the cemetery; it paid the rabbi, the cantor, and the shamas. It controlled religious education and ritual slaughter. It provided assistance to the needy. To perform these services, the kehilla levied taxes on the Jews in the community. The kehilla also represented the community before the government. Celia S. Heller, On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland between the Two World Wars (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 164-165.

⁶ The shamas (shammash) was one of the three employees of the Jewish community who was paid a regular salary. Depending on whether he worked for the synagogue or the religious courts, the shamas could serve as a tax collector, a bailiff, a secretary, a notary, a handyman, a messenger, or a summoner to prayer. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Shammash."

⁷ "Shul" is the Yiddish word for synagogue. It derives from the German word "schule" (school) which German Jews called their synagogues. The term is appropriate because synagogues were often houses of study as well as prayer. The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Synagogue."

⁸ "Shtibl" is the Yiddish word for a small room. It derives from the German word "stube" (room). The term took on the particular connotation of a small room used for prayer because the Hasidim called their synagogues "shtibl." Hasidism (Chassidism) was a religious movement within Judaism that emerged in Eastern Europe in the latter part of the eighteenth century. It stressed joy, exuberance, and faith over study and learning. The Hasidim preferred to pray and meet in small unadorned rooms, rather than in elaborate synagogues. Despite the opposition of many rabbis, Hasidism gained many adherents in the course of the nineteenth century. However, by the century's end, it had become more institutionalized and political, less spontaneous and spiritual. Most Hasidim in Eastern Europe maintained the traditional

Pesach.⁹ My father went there because it was a good time to get together with other men and talk about the events of the past year. Before Pesach and the High Holidays they would paint the room and clean it.¹⁰ Then they would have a service. The rest of the year they kept a chazan, a cantor, and let some poor boys sit there and study, so it stayed a shul.

Rena's family¹¹, the Levines, had a big flour mill. Every year for the High Holidays they would hire a chazan and invite some of the ladies of the city to come and listen to this chazan sing his service. They had tea and cakes so the ladies wouldn't have to suffer any hardships while they listened to the chazan sing. This was called the "vabarishe" minyan, the wives minyan.¹² My mother used to go there. I was supposed to

cautious view of the outside world, eschewing all but necessary contact with non-Jews and opposing movements like Zionism and Socialism. Heller, *Edge*, 29-30; Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Hasidism."

⁹ "Goyishe" is the Yiddish adjective meaning non-Jewish.

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year; the term literally means "start of the year" in Hebrew. Rosh Hashanah begins the Ten Days of Penitence which end with Yom Kippur. During this period, God looks into people's hearts and minds and passes judgment on their fate. However, the judgment is held in abeyance and only finalized on Yom Kippur, so by prayer, penitence, and good deeds one may modify it. Rosh Hashanah usually falls in September or October. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Rosh Ha-Shanah."

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the holiest, most solemn day of the Jewish year. It is a day when Jews fast and go to synagogue to confess their sins and pray for forgiveness.

Pesach is a spring holiday which celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt over 3200 years ago. The name means "pass over" in Hebrew; the holiday is called Pesach because God passed over the houses of the children of Israel when he brought the plagues to Egypt. Pesach is celebrated by religious services and a ritual meal, the Seder, at which special symbolic foods are eaten and the Hagadah is recited. The Hagadah tells the story of the liberation from slavery and also includes rabbinical commentary and prayers. To commemorate their ancestors' rapid departure from Egypt, Jews eat unleavened bread (matzo) and remove all leavening from their homes. Some have a special set of dishes that they use only on Pesach. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Passover."

¹⁰ The High Holidays include Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and the Days of Penitence between the two.

¹¹ Rena is Ida's sister-in-law, the wife of Ida's brother Wit.

¹² A minyan refers to the group of ten male Jews, aged thirteen and over, that is the minimum needed to have a religious service. Today in Reform Judaism women can be counted to make up the minyan, but in traditional Judaism they do not count. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Minyan."

go also, to hear the blowing of the shofar, but there were usually so many people my age there that we didn't spend much time listening to the shofar.¹³

A lot of Jewish people in the town wore caftans.¹⁴ My father wore one when he first came to Siedlce, but the first thing he did after he arrived was discard it. My father was raised by a rabbi because his father was never home and there were a lot of children in the family. The rabbi stayed at their house, and he was supposed to teach them and keep them in line. When the father came home, the children had to stand up in front of him and recite the Torah and show what this rabbi had accomplished during his absence.¹⁵ My father said this rabbi was terribly strict and would wake the children in the middle of the night to say prayers and make them fast on certain days. My father hated the whole thing, and when he was a young boy, he swore that he would never make his children do any of these things. He also decided that as soon as he got away, everything would go out of the window. And that is exactly what he did. When he came to Siedlce, he was seventeen or eighteen years old. The first thing he did was throw away the caftan and call in a tailor and order a whole new wardrobe of regular suits. He shaved his beard. Many years later, when I was a teenager, this rabbi came to our house to visit. He was

¹³ The shofar is the ram's horn sounded in the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to announce the start and end of the Days of Penitence. The horn of any animal except a bull can serve as a shofar, but a ram's horn is preferred because it recalls the sacrifice of Isaac. The sound of the shofar is supposed to remind Jews of the Torah and of the resurrection, when the shofar will call the scattered tribes of Israel to be reunited in the Holy Land. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Shofar."

¹⁴ The caftan was a black coat-like garment worn over trousers by orthodox Jewish men; it varied in length from knee to ankle and in quality with the wearer's wealth. Like beards and sidelocks, caftans were typically abandoned by young Jews who were secularizing or assimilating.

¹⁵ Narrowly used, the Torah refers to the Five Books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. More broadly, it can also refer to the commentary on the original books added through centuries by scholars and sages. The Torah is central to Judaism and its study is highly valued. It is read throughout the year in synagogue at services.

appalled - he wouldn't even drink a glass of tea because he was so appalled. My father said that it was the rabbi's fault he had thrown everything away because religion should be taught in a gentle way. He said the rabbi had hammered it into them.

Jews lived all over town, but there were certain streets where only Jews lived. Poor people lived in certain neighborhoods. A few years before the war a suburb with modern homes was built. They didn't sell any lots to Jews, but generally there was no closed ghetto before the war.

Jews owned a lot of real estate. Often a tailor or shoemaker would work all his life and finally buy a house with two or three apartments which he rented. We lived in a pretty house in an area that was half Jewish, half Christian. The owner of the house was a roofer, and he lived in the basement because he preferred to rent the house.

In the middle of town there was a large prison, a handsome building, one of the most famous prisons in all of Russia. It housed about a thousand prisoners. They would leave the prison every day to work on farms and drive horses. People were not afraid of the prisoners because most of them were thieves or pickpockets. Some had killed someone, but mostly in crimes of passion. Most of the murderers were country boys who had killed their wives or someone who went out with their girlfriend. Sometimes at weddings everyone got drunk and people got killed. Sometimes the bridegroom, after the wedding, was imprisoned for killing someone. There was a famous safe-cracker in the prison. Rape was unknown.

My grandfather, my father's father, supplied food to the Russian Tsar's army, mostly meat and groats. He spent a lot of time in Moscow. My other grandfather, my mother's father, was a flour merchant. He stayed in Russia and bought grain for the mills

and then sold the flour to people who supplied the army. He spent all of World War I in Russia. He never came home because he couldn't get out. My uncles had wholesale flour businesses, as an outgrowth of what their fathers did. When the Communists took over in Russia my father's family business disappeared and he had to look for another business. He was left with a lifelong hatred of Communism. In the prison there were a lot of Communists and my father, as much as he helped some prisoners, never did anything for a Communist prisoner. There was a well-known Senator, Gruenbaum, whose son was a student and became a Communist.¹⁶ A lot of Jewish young people became Communists because they reached a dead end.¹⁷ He was arrested and put in prison. This Senator came and asked my father to help. Usually my father wouldn't do anything to help Communists. He was dead-set against them; he thought they undermined everything. But Gruenbaum and his wife came and finally, as a personal favor to them, he said he would see if he could do something for the son.

In 1918, when Poland came into existence,¹⁸ it inherited a lot of equipment from the Russian army which people didn't know how to use. Among these things were ropes

¹⁶ The Jewish senator Yizchak Gruenbaum (1879-1960) was one of Polish Jewry's most outspoken leaders in the inter-war years. Elected to the Sejm in 1918, he fought to get the rights of all minorities guaranteed in the 1921 Constitution. Until his departure from Poland in 1932, he fought the government's anti-Semitic policies and battled for equal rights for the Jews. Gruenbaum also led a radical faction of Zionists; in Palestine he remained active in Zionist affairs and was a member of the Jewish Agency Executive. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Yizchak Gruenbaum."

¹⁷ Only a small minority of Jews ever belonged to the Polish Communist Party, but the Jews were a substantial minority within the party and held highly visible leadership positions. Jews belonged to other Polish parties also, but no other Polish party had as large a percentage of Jewish members as the Communist Party. Moshe Mishkinsky, "The Communist Party of Poland and the Jews" in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz and Chone Shmeruk (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 63. The party attracted Jews because it offered a hope of universal brotherhood; unlike other Polish political parties, it opposed anti-Semitism and promised to recognize the Jews' cultural identity. *Idem*, 65.

¹⁸ The Treaty of Versailles ending World War I restored independence to Poland. Poland had

of nautical thickness, mountains of them. These ropes were about six inches in diameter. Poland had no navy to use these ropes, but the army needed a lot of strong ropes because it used horses to pull cannons and in the cavalry. My father thought that the sisal or flax in the nautical ropes could be reworked, so he got the ropes from the government and hired some poor people to cut them into pieces with axes. He closed off some little streets and laid out the long ropes and the people cut them into shorter pieces. Then women unraveled them and attached the flax to a wheel and spun it into longer, narrower ropes. They had to use the streets because nobody had a room twenty feet long. All summer hundreds of people worked on this project; even children helped unravel the rope. The project took a long time, and my father got some letters of commendation from the government for it.

He also made backpacks for soldiers. The army needed hundreds of thousands of these so he opened a factory and hired a lot of people. When the workload got very heavy, they decided to use prisoners. The prisoners wanted to work because they got bored sitting doing nothing. The government allowed him to go into the prison and use the prisoners as workers. Eventually he had several hundred prisoners working at his factory making ski shoes, running shoes with spikes - sprinting shoes they were called - boxing gloves, and other sporting goods.

In the 1930's some people at Astra, a company which made sport articles, contacted my father about making espadrilles. The Spanish had been making them but stopped when the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936. These espadrilles had a sole

been divided among the Austrians, Prussians and Russians at the end of the eighteenth century, with Siedlce in the part of Poland under Russian rule. Polish statehood had been briefly resurrected during Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, but the victorious allies re-partitioned the Duchy of Warsaw at Vienna in 1815.

made of woven hard string, with a strip of linen in front and along the sides. They were used on tennis courts because the courts were made of sand that could not take rubber-soled shoes. Since people had to wear the soft espadrilles to play tennis there was a great demand for them. The people at Astra asked my father to make them, and they brought some shoes from Spain that he copied. The prisoners would make a braid of jute, about an inch wide, and then set the braid on edge into wooden forms shaped like a sole. They would sew the braid together so it would last and then they would press the sole into shape with a steam press and put a top on it. The espadrilles became very popular. The factory made ten to twenty thousand pairs of them each year.

There was a factory outside the prison and another one inside. One was dependent on the other. One did one part and the other did another part. We had a lot of strikes in the outside factory. The foreman of the outside factory would show up, especially in the summer, on Saturday night wearing his best clothes and announce that tomorrow morning the workers were not coming to work. The week started on Sunday. My father used to get very mad, so I learned to cut leather and materials and sew so that the other factory wouldn't stop working. I would do a lot of prepping. The leather had to be cut to a certain form so they could work with it. I set up a table in the kitchen and I would work with my father. I liked to work with my hands and I liked working with my father, so I helped him a lot in the factory. I also loved to be in the kitchen at home, so I used to help the maid. I'd help her scrub and clean because I liked it better than anything else.

When the prison factory got big, the union started opposing it because they didn't think that the prisoners should have the jobs. They figured that if my father employed

several hundred prisoners, several hundred fewer people outside had work. The Sejm passed a special law allowing him to employ the prisoners. Prisoners would look to prison to learn a trade. They would go in as country boys and come out knowing how to make shoes or tennis nets. He rehabilitated many people, and he became very well-known. He never wore a gun in the prison. The guards wore guns and suggested that he wear one, but he never did. He trusted those prisoners and he was never afraid to go in the prison. No one ever did anything to him.

I used to go to the prison a lot too. I helped in the prison office, and I learned to type there. The prison had a big theater and once a year, around Christmas, the prisoners would put on a play. I always went to the play, and my father would introduce me to everyone. We never had a problem. Before the war they voted to give him a medal for rehabilitating so many people. There was even a book written about him by a government official who was once sent to this prison for embezzling a lot of money. He got friendly with my father, and when he was released he wrote a book about his experiences in the prison. He devoted several chapters to my father. We had a copy of the book, but it was lost in the war.

My father was not really an ordinary man. He was a friend to the prisoners and they loved working for him. Twice a year at holidays he gave them packages. He would order lots of kielbasa - Polish sausage - and cakes and cigarettes and have them delivered to our house. We would make packages and wrap them and bring them to the factory for the prisoners. During the rest of the year he would give them premiums and they also earned money.

My father had lifers working for him. Some were sentenced to death, which was carried out by hanging. There was a hangman who traveled all over the country, wherever there was to be an execution. When they started to build the gallows for an execution in the prison my father would close the factory and stay home. He wouldn't go there. He said that when the hangman arrived he would come to the prison to shake hands with the warden, but nobody would shake hands with him.

Prisoners often got pardons because my father recommended their release. He would write a letter and the authorities would pardon the prisoner and let him go. After their release some of the prisoners would write him letters and keep in touch. Prisoners would come from other prisons because they wanted to work for him. He did a lot for them. There was a Jewish man from our town in prison who was very religious, and everyday his wife would bring a little container of kosher food to our house for him because he wouldn't eat the prison food. Every morning my father would take the food to the prison for this man to eat. He was very well known and liked.

My mother was tougher; she was a fighter. She told us what to do, and we had to do it. You could deal with my father better. As a man he probably was softer. A man's role in those years was different from today. Today men stay home and diaper babies; in those years, the functions in the house were strictly divided. The man was supposed to be the head of the household and his word was law. He was the provider. The woman ran the house and raised the children. It was a very clear division. But my mother was a fighter by nature. They used to arrange marriages for girls without asking them. In Poland, the rabbis had courts. People who gave the rabbi a lot of money would sit at the rabbi's table - they were like his inner court. My grandfather used to go to a certain

rabbi's house for important holidays. He met a man there who had a son, and they immediately arranged a marriage between their children. When my grandfather came home and told my mother that she was engaged, she said she didn't know the boy and she didn't know if she would like him or not. She was fourteen or fifteen years old at the time. She started crying and screaming that she was not going to marry the boy. This went on for awhile, and finally her father agreed to let her meet the boy, which was unheard of at that time. He wrote the other parents and they came to Siedlce with the boy. Her mother said to her, "Why don't you marry him, he looks like a human being." But my mother was still opposed to the principle of this arranged marriage, and she finally left the house and went to live with an aunt. The aunt lived in the same city, but at that time it was like running away from home. She got very sick with jaundice, and her parents finally broke off the engagement.

She always read newspapers. She and her younger brother used to hide newspapers in the attic because you weren't supposed to read non-religious books or papers. It was like converting to Christianity. You were supposed to read only the Torah and the holy books. At that time there were many revolutionaries and she was interested in their writings. But they were all atheists, agnostics, non-believers. It was just unheard of, especially for a girl. A girl wasn't supposed to know anything, so she was sort of a rebel. When she married my father, it was her choice.

My father's father had a big business with offices in several towns. He had a lot of children and as soon as they reached a certain age - eighteen, nineteen or twenty - he would send them off to manage one of the offices. He would usually send a servant with them, like a valet. Siedlce had a big army garrison so they had an office there. My

grandfather sent my father to Siedlce to manage this office. The news that a young man who was wealthy and good-looking had moved to Siedlce spread quickly. My mother somehow managed to meet him and got to know him and when they finally decided to marry, her father agreed because his family was all right. In personality I am more like my mother, but I was closer to my father than I was to my mother. My father influenced me more. I had a lot of fights with my mother. My mother wanted me to go to university, but she had no say in this matter. It was impossible. When you live in a small town, the whole family is around you and you have to be very independent to push through your ideas. I remember when I graduated high school I was going with a boy, and the family wanted me to marry him, but my mother was very much opposed to marrying that young. My mother said, "No, I don't want her to marry at seventeen. I want her to be free a few years." I knew the boy - we grew up together - and his family was nice, so there was no particular reason for her to oppose the marriage, except that what she did not want for herself, she didn't want for me either. But that was about the extent of her asserting herself.

I liked my father very much. He was very gentlemanly, very well dressed, handsome, very strong on manners. We had one friend who would slurp when he ate. Sometimes his wife would be out of town and my mother would invite him for dinner and my father would always say, "Look, you can invite him as many times as you want, but feed him before I come home because I can't stand his table manners." My father put great emphasis on how people behaved, how they talked, how they ate and drank, how they dressed. No matter what you talked about, it was very important to him to have good manners. We grew up that way. If we didn't behave at the table we went to the

kitchen to eat with the maid. Anyone who ate at my father's table was expected to behave.

My father liked to cook, and often on Saturday, especially in winter, he would cook soup. He had a whole group of friends who were hangers-on - an assorted lot who weren't too well-off. One was the man who slurped - he was a big-shot in the Socialist party, but he was a big schlemiel too.¹⁹ He spoke English and lived in London awhile because some English Socialist invited him to visit. Later he married an old lady who had money. He didn't get along very well with his wife, but she had the money so she ruled the roost. On Saturday night my father would cook a big pot of soup - potato soup or groat soup - and this man and some of his other friends would all come in to eat this hot soup with bread. He never could get me or my brother or my mother to eat it, because we hated it, but those men were a captive audience.

We had a nice family life - we had a lot of friends and people came over often. My mother's father used to play a lot of poker for high stakes, and my mother liked cards, but she didn't play. My father didn't know one card from the other. He didn't drink, he didn't play cards; his only interests were the family and the factory, and Saturday night he would have this gathering of friends whom he would feed, especially in the winter.

In the summer we used to get black bread from a bakery on our street and eat it with sour cream and cucumbers and radishes. The bread was baked on horseradish leaves so it had a tangy smell. Horseradish has big leaves and they would put the leaves under the loaves and then put the loaves on top of bricks in the ovens. They heated the

¹⁹ The Yiddish word "schlemiel" (or shlemiel) can refer to a foolish person, a consistently unlucky person, or a social misfit. Leo Rosten, The Joys of Yiddish (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 344.

ovens with wood and the bricks got hot. On Saturday afternoons relatives would come and drink tea and eat cake and discuss the week's business. My mother's mother used to come on Saturdays, but she didn't like the fact that we cooked dinner on Saturday. She was very religious. My father would get annoyed and say "Why does she come at one o'clock when she knows that the maid is cooking dinner? If she doesn't like it, she should come at three o'clock after we've eaten and it's all cleaned up." I did not like my grandmother because she was very nosy. My father would never come in my room without knocking on the door. When my grandmother came over she opened every door and stuck her nose in. Sometimes I had friends in the room, and I didn't like it. Also, she didn't like certain friends I had because she didn't think that the families were up to our standards. I had a friend whose father was a butcher. His father worked in the slaughterhouse, and that was considered the lowest of the low. If a shoemaker and a tailor were low, a butcher was really the rock bottom. There were four children in his family - three sons who looked exactly alike, and a sister. There was an accident in the slaughterhouse, and the father died very young. However, he had an older brother, also a butcher, who had made a lot of money. When he died, this older brother promised to educate the children. He put the oldest son through medical school, and the daughter he married off. The second son wanted to be a dentist; he tried about three times to get into dental school, but despite money and pull he could not get in. He was very depressed. The youngest one couldn't be taught anything, he couldn't even read. He said he wanted to work in the slaughterhouse like his father. The mother said she was very happy that the youngest boy did not want to learn to read and write, because, she said, my daughter married a merchant who has a nice house, my oldest son is a doctor, he'll marry a rich girl and have

a doctor's house, the second is going to be a dentist, but when I get old the only place I will have to live will be with my youngest son, who still will be a butcher and be on my level. He, she said, is the one child I still will have. In a way it was true, because the daughter lived in Warsaw in a nice house, and the mother didn't fit in. Not that they didn't want her, she just didn't fit in. She certainly didn't fit in with the surgeon.

The son who wanted to be a dentist was my age; his name was David and he was a very good friend of mine. We were like a brother and a sister. He would come over to the house and have dinner with my family, even if I wasn't there. He wanted to be a dentist badly. Actually, he wanted to be a doctor but they couldn't get him into the medical school so he decided to be a dentist. When he would come back to Siedlce after the test and find out he wasn't accepted, he would work on the streets crushing rocks. At that time the streets were covered with cobblestones. People would break up big rocks with a hammer to make small stones and set them in the cement. He had a second cousin who ran a business paving the streets. He would be so angry he would sit on the street and crush the rocks with a hammer. If he went to Warsaw for the test and then I didn't see him for a day or two after the test, I knew that he was out crushing those rocks. We would go to a street which was being paved and find him on his knees and pull him up. He never became a dentist and later he was killed in the war. My grandmother objected strongly to my friendship with him because he was a butcher's son. I didn't like her attitude because he was really a nice boy.

We didn't like my grandmother, but my mother made us do certain things she wanted. My mother felt that she didn't receive the respect she deserved. When my grandmother came to our house, she always brought a Torah written in Yiddish, which

she would read to us. We had to sit and listen to her or my mother would get very angry. My grandmother would read aloud to us every Saturday. Also, every year at Rosh Hashanah we had to go and wish her a Happy New Year, and we had to eat the cookies she made. We just hated them. I don't know what she put in them, but she was kind of stingy so it was probably the cheapest oil and flour. She always gave us sugar cookies, and we had to eat them because my mother watched us like a hawk. She also made Pesach wine. She would soak raisins and the wine looked like mud. Nobody ever drank it, but you had to suffer through certain things. On certain points you didn't fool with my mother. We had our father's support because he also disliked her. We always knew that afterwards we had a shoulder to cry on, someone who was willing to listen because he was on our side.

My grandmother was very religious. During the week she wore a wig because her head was shaved, but on Saturdays and holidays she wore a black silk turban. In the front it had beads and little stones. In the back it looked like a bun made of hair but it was made of silk. She always wore a long skirt; on weekdays it was cotton, but on holidays and Saturdays it was a heavy black silk with a fringe on the bottom.²⁰

My mother's father, Jacob Huberman, was a merchant, and he liked good food and drink. He used to play poker and go to the rabbi's house and socialize. He was tall and wore a fur coat. He was hilarious. My father loved him. We all loved him. He did not get along with my grandmother too well either. One of his problems with her involved tea. He liked a good strong cup of tea. When she made tea it was so weak it

²⁰ Orthodox Jewish women dressed modestly, covering their arms and legs. At one time they shaved their heads and wore wigs when they married. During the inter-war years, many stopped this practice but continued to cover their hair with wigs or scarves. Heller, *Edge*, 146.

looked like someone had already made seven cups from the tea. So when he came to our house, my father used to make him strong tea and give him cakes. But one day he played cards and went to bed and in the morning he did not wake up. He was never sick. He just died in his sleep. He was seventy-two years old. I must have been eighteen or nineteen at the time.

My grandmother died in 1939 when the war broke out. She was in her late eighties. She had a stroke about seven o'clock in the morning. She couldn't talk or move but she lived until four o'clock in the afternoon. At that time they didn't do anything for stroke; they just let you lie. There were no therapies or machines.

I never knew my father's parents. My father's father died in 1914 - six weeks before I was born. His name was Yehuda Lev Tenenbaum and I was named Yehudith after him. My father's mother lived about a year or two longer. My father used to tell me that before his father died he told his wife that she should be independent, that she shouldn't live with any of the children. The children rented her an apartment in Warsaw and she lived there until she died. So I never knew her.

There were six or seven children in my father's family but some died young. He had two sisters. The older sister's name was Leah Gisser. She was widowed early, which was not uncommon in those days. She was left with a big house which she turned into a rooming house to earn a living. She had four children, three daughters and a son. At that time a lot of people were emigrating to different countries. They would come and stay in Warsaw until they got their passports and their visas. In 1920 Poland was at war with

Russia and everybody was drafted.²¹ All the high school boys volunteered to join the army. Her son David was about seventeen or eighteen, and he joined too. He became a telegraphist. At that time every regiment had a guy who would send messages over the telegraph in Morse Code. His battalion was in a trench and the Russians attacked and killed everybody in the trench. Somehow he was only wounded, but he was buried under the pile of corpses. When the Polish troops finally repelled this attack, and the Poles came back to pull out the corpses, they found him underneath, still working the telegraph. They brought him to a hospital because he was wounded, and when Marshal Pilsudski came to visit the hospital, he was pointed out as a big hero, only seventeen years old.²² Marshal Pilsudski asked him what kind of medal he wanted. David said that he did not want a medal, he wanted leave to go home to see his mother. Since the war was still going on, no leaves were being granted, but Pilsudski gave him one.

He started going to Warsaw, but by that time the Russians were close to Warsaw so he could not get to it. He managed to get to Siedlce. He came to our house and said to my father, "Uncle, whatever happens, I am not going back to the army." At that time he could not get to Warsaw anyway, but then, when the Russians retreated, he was considered a deserter. Desertion carried a death sentence. My father had this seventeen-year-old boy on his hands who insisted that, no matter what, he was not going back. We

²¹ The Polish – Soviet War of 1919-20 lasted approximately two years. The peace treaty signed at Riga, Latvia, on March 18, 1921, delineated the border between Poland and the Soviet Union. Davies, Heart, 103.

²² Marshal Jozef Pilsudski (1867-1935), "the champion of modern Polish independence," served as Chief of State of independent Poland for the first four years of its existence, then withdrew from politics in 1922, disgusted by parliamentary discord. He returned to power in a coup d'etat in 1926. Although he only held formal office briefly, he ran the government from behind the scenes until his death. Unlike his rival Roman Dmowski, Pilsudski saw Poland as a nation that could encompass different nationalities, as long as they shared the same loyalties. *Ibid.*, 118-120.

had one room at the end of our apartment where, during that war, we put all the valuables. We closed the door and put a big armoire in front of it so if there was any looting, the good things would not be found. My father put David in this room where nobody would see him and tried to figure out what to do with him. David sat in this room for quite a while. I don't remember how long because at that time we all got scarlet fever. My brother Samuel got it first and my parents put me at a neighbor's house so I wouldn't catch it, but it didn't help. I caught it anyway. We were all very sick but we recovered. At that time they didn't put you in the hospital, they just sprayed the house and put it under quarantine. David was still locked up in this back room.

Finally, my father smuggled him back to Warsaw to his mother. She kept him hidden and tried to figure out what to do. If somebody saw him he could be executed, but he couldn't spend a lifetime in hiding either. Luckily a wealthy man who was going to Brazil with his daughter stopped at the boarding house. The daughter was about seventeen or eighteen years old and she saw David, and they fell in love. She said she was not going to go without him. Somehow they got married and the father paid a lot of money and got him out of the country to Brazil. In Brazil they opened a big fur store. David wrote to my father and several times he wanted to come visit Poland but he couldn't because there was no amnesty for war deserters, and there was no statute of limitations. Finally, he got his mother and his three sisters passports and sent a man to bring them to Brazil. Before they went to Brazil he gave them a tour of Europe. His mother stayed in Brazil about six months and then came back to Warsaw. She hated Brazil. All the men had mustaches. Her daughters were going to marry Brazilian men. She couldn't stand it. She wanted to be back in Poland. She stayed in Warsaw but she

had no money, so David started sending her money. After about a year she missed the children, so David sent her a ticket to come back to Brazil, this time without fanfare. She went to Brazil, stayed there a little while, then she came back to Warsaw. The Brazilian life didn't appeal to her. This time David said, "Enough, I am not sending you any more money. You have a choice: either you stay in Warsaw and see that you make a living or I send you a ticket and you can come back." My father gave her a little money, but she soon went back to Brazil and stayed there.

At some point, David's first wife died, and he wanted to get married again. He wrote my father that he would like to marry a girl from Warsaw. She didn't have to have anything. He had plenty of money; she only had to be nice and pretty, very pretty. That's all he wanted because the Brazilians put a lot of importance on looks. He wanted to come to Poland but lawyers told my father that the moment he stepped on Polish soil he would be arrested and executed. My father sent him pictures of girls who wanted to marry and almost succeeded in arranging a visit to Gdansk, which was a free city, but nothing ever came of it because the war broke out. He was older than I am, so I don't know if he is still alive, but he had children there.

My father also had a younger sister, Beulah, who was very beautiful. She and her family also went to Brazil because in the late twenties, when the crash occurred in the United States, they weren't doing too well. A lot of people tried to emigrate from Poland then. She had a son named Leon who was exactly my age. He was named after the same grandfather. When I was in New York, I saw Leah Gisser who told me that Leon had a daughter who is a very well-known pianist in Brazil. Leon also was in the fur business. David took the whole family in.

My father also had a brother who went to New York. When I met him, he was already an old man. He died a short while later. He had a son who was a very colorful character. The son took the name Pierre and became a hairdresser. He wore a beret with a silk scarf and told everybody he was a Frenchman. His father told me he didn't see much of him because he lived outside of New York in the countryside and rode horses and socialized with the high society. I don't know what happened to him. That branch of the family disappeared.

My mother had two brothers and a sister. The younger brother lived in Lodz and his whole family died in the war. My mother's sister lived in Siedlce. She was a romantic. She and my sister-in-law, Chana Feinsilber, were very good friends. My aunt's husband was the liaison between the Gestapo and the Jewish community. He would report in the morning and take the beatings. The day when the Nazis ordered everyone out, he took his two boys by the hand and marched with them to the Umschlagplatz.²³ I have a book which the Siedlce survivors group in Argentina printed, and they describe him as a saint, because he took all this punishment and then decided not to fight.²⁴ His wife, my mother's sister, stayed in hiding with my mother, and they both got shot on the street.

²³ "Umschlagplatz" is the German word for a trans-shipment center or transfer station.

²⁴ After the war, Jewish survivors from different towns in Poland published memorial books to commemorate their towns and compatriots. The books typically contained essays written by survivors describing life before and during the war. Some historians have criticized these books for inaccuracies in details and for subjectivity, but others believe that the books are a valuable source of historical material because they are written by people who lived the events. Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, "Yizker Bikher and the Problem of Historical Veracity: An Anthropological Approach" in The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars, ed. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz and Chone Shmeruk (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 531. The Siedlce memory book was published in Argentina in 1956. It contains an essay by Ida narrating some of the war experiences recounted here. Mrs. Henry Galler graciously translated the essay, written in Yiddish, for me.

My mother's older brother also lived in Siedlce. He was the leader of the religious party. We did not see him much because our house was not kosher and he would not come to eat, but he would always come on the last day of Pesach when he could drink tea from a glass which wasn't kosher for Pesach. He was one of the Shomer Shabbat, the guardians of the Sabbath, and they would picket the Polish schools if Jewish kids were in school on Saturday.²⁵ There were not too many Jewish kids in the Polish schools, only two to a class, but they picketed anyway. It was very funny because they would walk on the street in front of my school and I would come out and there was my uncle picketing. He would always pretend he didn't see me. Siedlce was like a microcosmos - it was a small town but it had a little bit of everything. Even within a family there was a lot of variety. It was very colorful. Later they sent delegations to the Ministry of Education asking that Jewish kids be excused from school on Saturday and that no tests be given that day so the children wouldn't miss them. Finally the Ministry agreed. On a Jewish holiday, the teachers wouldn't give any tests or introduce any important subjects. But I don't think any Jewish kids really took a lot of notice because the Jewish kids who went to the government schools came from reformed homes that weren't very religious. To me it didn't matter. I still went to school on Saturday.

During the war, this brother's family crossed the Bug River to the Russian side.²⁶ They were in a small town and one night Ukrainians surrounded the town and killed all

²⁵ "Shomer Shabbat" literally means "guardian of the Sabbath" in Hebrew. It refers to a religious Jew who observes all the commandments relating to Sabbath. These include prohibitions on working, handling money, driving, cooking, and turning on electricity.

²⁶ The original Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, dated August 23, 1939, divided Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union along the Vistula River. Norman Davies, God's Playground: A History of Poland (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2:433. On September 29 Stalin agreed to move the

the Jews. Then they burned the town to make sure anyone still alive burned to death. The Ukrainians were very anti-Semitic. They were divided between Russia and Poland, and they wanted independence. They thought that if they sided with the Germans, the Germans would help them become independent. Hitler promised them that if he defeated Russia he would create an independent Ukraine. A lot of Ukrainians enlisted in the German army and the Germans put them in the S.S. killing squads.²⁷ They were very sadistic and blood-thirsty. They even had a general who defected from Russia, a Ukrainian general who led the whole Ukrainian army. There was very little educated class; they were mostly uneducated farmers. Kiev was their capital in Russia; in Poland it was Lvov. When Poland was divided between Russia and Germany in 1939, there were groups of Ukrainians in the Russian part who were fighting for the Germans like guerrillas. They were doing to Jews on the Russian side exactly what the Germans were doing to Jews on the German side. They thought that such conduct would elevate them in German eyes, because when Hitler came, the area would be free of Jews.

Before the war, in the early 30's, the Polish Interior Minister visited Lvov and the Ukrainians threw a bomb and killed him. A lot of Ukrainians were arrested at that time.

demarcation line east to the Bug River, thus placing more Polish territory, including Siedlce, in German hands. Martin Gilbert, *Second World War* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), 16. Before the border was closed in December 1939 Poles crossed it in both directions, some thinking life would be better in German-occupied Poland, others believing Soviet control preferable. *Idem*, 23.

²⁷ Ukrainians were generally considered anti-Semitic because the Ukraine was the setting of numerous bloody pogroms, including the notorious Chmielnicki massacres of 1648-1649, in which 100,000 Jews were killed and most Jewish communities wiped out, and the 1919-1920 pogroms under Petlyura in which another 100,000 died. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Ukraine." When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, they were welcomed by the Ukrainians who thought the Germans would help them gain their independence. Many Ukrainians collaborated enthusiastically in rounding up and shooting Jews. Dr. Abraham Duker, a member of the American team at the Nuremberg trials, studied numerous documents and concluded that the Ukrainians were "especially egregious collaborationists," brutalizing Jews in the ghettos and tormenting them in the concentration camps. Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 23-34. Approximately sixty percent of the Ukrainian Jews were killed in the war. Dawidowicz, *War*, 400-401.

The leader of the Free Ukrainian Party was a young man about twenty-two, a student at the Polytechnic University in Lvov. He was not directly involved in this assassination, but because he was the leader of the party, the Polish government arrested him. They put him in our prison and my father got very friendly with him. He was a political prisoner, so he could not work, but my father helped him in any way he could. Later, when he was released, he wrote letters to my father and my father sent him money to help him out. During the war he became a very important person in politics. My brother Wit was once caught by the bunch of guerrillas that this man led. They let Wit go because this man recognized him. They could have killed him. After the war, this man went to Paris and was very active in politics there. He was killed by the Russians when he came out of a grocery. Somebody passed him and stuck him with a poisoned pin, and he died within a day or two.

My father had another protégé, a Jewish boy, Shaia Grunberg, whose mother died and whose father couldn't manage him. They were our neighbors. Shaia's father asked my father if he could do something for the boy. My father got Shaia into a very good technical school that usually didn't accept Jews. My father knew the school's director because the director made some machinery parts for my father. They put the boy in this school to be a mechanic, but he ran away a few times. He finally went to Spain to fight in the Spanish Civil War. At that time a lot of rebellious kids in Poland ran away to Spain to fight. He became a big hero there but he was killed in that war.

So my mother's older brother and his family were killed by a group of Ukrainian guerrillas. They had four children, two girls and two boys. The older boy was a book worm; the younger boy, Motek, was the wild one and the only one who survived.

Somehow he got out a back window and escaped to the woods where he joined the partisans.²⁸ He promised himself that he was going to take revenge. One night his group surrounded a little Ukrainian town and killed everybody and burned the town. Then he joined the Russian army and became a lieutenant. When the war ended, he went back to Poland and married. Later he came to Germany to see us. At that time he was smuggling goods to make money, but he wanted to leave Poland because he was afraid he would be arrested for smuggling. He had also left the Russian army. Wit and David told him not to go back to Poland. They told him they would send somebody to get his wife out. But he wouldn't listen. His last name was Huberman; he said in Russia his name was Guberman because the "h" was pronounced like a "g" and they didn't know it was the same person. Wit and David couldn't convince him. He went back and was arrested immediately. He was in prison about three or four years until they let him out and he went to Israel.

My mother never worked. In those days if a woman had to work her husband felt terrible, as if he was not providing for her. We had a maid who lived at our house and my mother liked to take naps after dinner, while the maid polished the dining room floor. We always had dinner in the dining room. At two my father came home to eat and after dinner he would go back to the factory, and my mother would lie down for a nap while the maid polished the floor.

²⁸ The partisans were Jewish and non-Jewish resistance fighters who generally lived in the forests of eastern Poland and engaged in guerilla actions against the Germans. Joining the partisans was a difficult decision for Jews because some regarded leaving the ghetto as an abandonment of the community. Most Jews were not prepared for life in the woods and were in poor physical health after confinement in the ghettos. Finally, some of the partisan groups and the peasants who supplied them with food were anti-Semitic, so Jews risked being denounced to the Nazis. Dawidowicz, *War*, 322-323.

The maid was usually a girl from a village in the country who stayed with you for years and years. She lived in the house and was like part of the family; there were no days or evenings off. When her family came to market they would sometimes come up and leave their bundles and my mother would give them a cup of tea in the kitchen. Our maid's name was Valerie but we called her Vala. Before Vala we had an old woman named Pauline. She really raised us. I remember her when she must have been about sixty or seventy years old. She belonged to some church solidarity, some order - all the maids were Catholic - and she had a fancy dress which looked like it was the group's habit. It was her most prized possession and she planned to be buried in it. When she got really old she went to a home run by this particular order, and I remember that once she wanted to see us so we went to visit her. She must have been about eighty, which in Poland was very old because people didn't live that long. When Vala came she was very naive. She didn't even know about electricity. We had to teach her everything, but she was very smart.

We lived on the third floor of our apartment building and from the balcony of our apartment you could look into the prison yard where the prisoners walked. Vala would look down into the prison, and a relationship began between her and one of the prisoners. He would wave and she would wave back. He happened to work for my father and he kept asking about her and she kept asking about him and my father became a messenger between them. A romance developed. Finally the prisoner wrote her a letter and told her that he was in prison for killing his wife; he had married an older woman who had a lot of land and he killed her. Vala began to see him on the days she could and in the meantime he applied for parole. He had already served about ten years and he was a nice man and a

good worker, so my father intervened and he was paroled. When he was released he came to our house and he and Vala got married and she went off with him to his hometown. We got another maid but she didn't stay long because the war broke out.

Siedlce was a small city, so distances were not large. Most places we walked. If you had to go far you hired a droshka, a carriage with a driver who wore a navy blue uniform with a long Russian coat with gold buttons. Sometimes when we went on a date the boy would hire one and we would go for a ride in the country. In the winter you could rent sleighs, little sleighs just for two; the horses wore bells and the sleigh would fly over the snow-covered fields with the bells ringing. There were very few cars. We didn't have a car. I knew only one person who had a car. In the years just before the war there was only one station where you could buy gasoline.

We read books a lot. I used to sit most of the day curled up reading. I read a whole series of Westerns written by a German writer who had never been to the West. We had a large library of Russian books in Russian but I didn't read them. I read all the Polish books. I read Gide and Moliere and Corneille and Racine in French. I read English books in Polish. The Forsythe Saga and Main Street. When I came here to this country I was very impressed with the libraries, with the fact that they were free and that you could browse. You couldn't do that in Poland. It was very strict. You had to write the names of the books you wanted on a piece of paper and the librarian would get the books for you. Also, you had to pay to use the library, and a lot of kids could not afford it. But schools had libraries so you could get books. Also, some new books were serialized in the newspaper when they came out. Everyday one page would be published. You would read it and then you would cut it out and put it between two covers. It was

like a book except that it was pieces of newspapers. A lot of the books published in the papers were romances with popular appeal. Isaac Bashevis Singer used to write in the Polish newspaper when he was in Poland. I think The Family Moskat was in the newspaper.²⁹

We had four movie theaters, and they were very elegant. They were not like movie theaters today. They didn't have as many seats, and you paid different prices for different seats. When I went with David we used to get a loge because it was closed in and had upholstered chairs. Most of our movies were American. We also got a lot of American magazines, with the text in Polish. The first movies were silent, but later they had sound. Many of them were in English with Polish subtitles. I remember Al Jolson and The Jazz Singer. I remember Leslie Howard - he was tall and blonde. Mostly I remember Greta Garbo - she was really the top star. Grand Hotel was terrific. I must have seen it three times. I remember the Powells and Charles Boyer. Errol Flynn was a big star. I remember him in The Charge of the Light Brigade. Douglas Fairbanks. There were movies that kids were not allowed to see. It was a lot stricter than now. If there was a kiss in the movie it was not allowed. Of course we all went to "not allowed" movies, but if you were caught, you were expelled from school, especially from my school. One of the biggest theaters had a little balcony that you could enter from a back staircase. The teachers usually sat downstairs when they went so the owner used to let us

²⁹ Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-1991) was a famous Yiddish writer. He lived in Warsaw until 1935, when he emigrated to the United States. His stories were published in Warsaw journals and his first book, Sotn in Goray (Satan in Goray), appeared in 1935. In the United States his stories and novels were published regularly in the New York Yiddish daily newspaper Forward. Di Familye Mushkat (The Family Moskat), a novel about Warsaw before the war, was serialized there. His writings are often set in the shtetl and peopled by spirits and demons. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Isaac Bashevis Singer." In 1978 he won the Nobel Prize in Literature "for his impassioned narrative art which, with roots in a Polish-Jewish cultural

sneak up these back stairs to the balcony. If there was a danger of being caught he would come and tell us and we would sneak out the back. Of course mostly we went to allowed movies.

Siedlce didn't have a local radio station, but we had radios called "super heterodynes" which brought in the whole world. On Sunday afternoon from three to four we would listen to "Tea From the Bristol". The Bristol was a very elegant hotel in Warsaw and they had movie stars on the show. Friday night we would listen to services from Jerusalem. Some nights we would listen to gypsy music from Bulgaria. They would broadcast from a night club, starting at ten.

Poland had a terrific national theater. It played Shakespeare and other foreign plays. The theater got a lot of government support but had to travel around the country and play in small cities so people could learn about theater. Once a month it would come to Siedlce and the schools would get cheap tickets and all the students would go to the performances. I saw all the Moliere and Shakespeare plays this way. There was a big theater which was used only for this purpose.

Around 1938 Reinhardt came to Poland and I saw him.³⁰ He was a famous director who was expelled from Germany. At that time he had done a political play about Hitler. My French teacher's son was an actor in the national theater in Warsaw. When they put on Romeo and Juliet, he told her that she could bring her French class, so all ten of us dressed up to go to Warsaw. At that time the first permanents had come out. They

tradition, brings universal human conditions to life." Nobel Prize Winners, ed. Tyler Wasson (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1987), 982.

³⁰ Max Reinhardt (1873-1943) was director of the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin from 1905 until 1933. He was known for his experimental and spectacular productions of classical and modern plays. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, he lost his job and in 1934 he emigrated to the United States. In

were done with heat. You wound your hair around little things that looked like screw drivers and you plugged in every few hairs with an electric plug and it burned around these screws, so you looked like you were electrocuted. We were still in school so we couldn't go get a permanent, so I and three other girls decided we were going to do our hair ourselves. We got a hot poker and we wound our hair around the poker until it curled. Our heads looked like they were covered with little sausages. When this guy came to the station to pick us up, he took one look and almost fell over. It was so funny, these ten little girls dressed to kill with their hair all curly. He got hysterical, but he took us to the theater and we saw Romeo and Juliet. After the play he took us to a sidewalk cafe, and we all got an ice cream dish. There were also a lot of vaudeville theaters to which I didn't go until I was older. At that time there was no nudity but some jokes were considered risqué.

There was a conservatory in Warsaw, and there were concerts there, but Siedlce did not have an orchestra. There was a little band, but we didn't get big concerts. Opera came once or twice a year. We also had a group of local people who sang and they had programs. Mistinguett and Chevalier came to Warsaw. Chaliapin, the great Russian pianist, also came. My mother went to see him, I didn't. Mostly we listened to records. My parents had a lot of records - different records but mostly Caruso. And a Cantor Rosenblatt. Siroto was very well known. Also the Zimbalist family. A Zimbalist means a man who plays the cymbal. Efrem Zimbalist was a professor of music. I remember once I played hide and seek with some friends and we knocked over the record player. It stood on a tall table. I thought my father and mother were going to kill me. Those record

his last years he ran an acting school on the west coast. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Max Reinhardt."

players were expensive. We used to buy the records in Warsaw. We didn't have any musical talent in my family. The Yomtovs had musical talent. They all sang beautifully. David's sister Salka had a gorgeous voice. On Friday night they used to sing, and when the windows were open people would sit in the little park near their house and listen. Some of them studied mandolin or violin, but it didn't go far. David studied the violin.

There were very few restaurants. We didn't go to restaurants to eat. To go to a restaurant in Siedlce was embarrassing. It meant your mother or your wife couldn't cook. If you were sick people would bring food to your house. Mostly traveling salesmen would go to restaurants. There was one good restaurant in the park. The main dish was pork chops. Maybe the Christians would go in, but among the Jewish population going to a restaurant was not proper. You wouldn't do it.

For a wedding you sent out invitations and people put notices in the local paper congratulating the couple. If somebody well-known in town married, the paper made money because two or three pages would be full of little notices that said, "best wishes to so-and-so from." Everybody wanted to have his name there. If there was a circumcision or an engagement, the shamas would run around town and open your door and call in that you were invited and sometimes you didn't know who invited you because he would shout "blah, blah, etc.". There were no telephones. Businesses had telephones, but homes didn't. Saturdays Jewish businesses were closed, and Saturday afternoons families visited. They came and had tea and cakes.

The stores were open until seven o'clock. They closed in the middle of the day for lunch. In the summer stores were open all day Friday because the day was long and they stayed closed all day Saturday. In the winter they would close on Friday at one or

two o'clock when it got dark and they would open Saturday evening after dark.³¹ Ninety percent of the stores - big or small - were owned by Jews. There were very, very few stores run by Christians. There was one big store, like a delicatessen, owned by Christians. Later a woman with a lot of money came from the United States and opened a dry goods store.

Friends would come at night. People knew the routine so there was no great need for a telephone. Everyday my mother went to the butcher to buy the meat for dinner so she met other people there and exchanged whatever news there was. Mostly the news was about somebody dying or getting engaged. We had kiosks like those in Paris on which people would post notices. When a Christian died, they would post a big piece of paper with a black border that said so and so died and gave the time of the funeral. A man used to run around town and paste the notices up. The Christians used to have very fancy funerals, with horses and music. The Jews didn't.

We didn't have big family reunions. There was no need for them. We saw each other all the time. Even in the Yomtov family, on Friday nights or holidays, Jacob and his family ate in their own house.³² They might come over after dinner and have a glass of tea and a piece of cake, but they did not come for dinner. You did not invite people to things like this. Also people didn't give parties unless it was a special occasion. Because

³¹ The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar, so a day begins at sunset the prior evening. The Jewish Sabbath, the day of rest, begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. Observant Jews do not work on the Sabbath. The majority of Jews in inter-war Poland were observant, so the Compulsory Sunday Rest Law adopted in 1919 was hard on them; it forced shopkeepers to close their stores two days a week, which they could ill afford, and prevented others from working in Polish enterprises which operated on Saturday. Heller, Edge, 101-102.

³² Jacob Yomtov was Ida's brother-in-law. He was the only Yomtov brother married before the war.

neighbors visited. They came to the house and talked. Every time you came you had to have tea and cake. There was no way you could refuse it. That was very impolite.

Siedlce had plenty of characters. If a man was not a very good provider and was a bookworm, he was the butt of many jokes. If a man married into a rich family and sat and studied Torah it was all right. But if he married and had a family and studied and didn't provide for the family, he was called a melamed. A melamed means, in Hebrew, a teacher.³³ If you wanted to say that somebody was stupid, you would say, "Oh, what do you expect from him, he is a melamed." In other words, he doesn't have a business head. We had a lot of characters like this. Then there were beggars. They were dressed in rags and they were really characters. One was lame and one was crippled and one was blind. I don't know if they really were but they made believe they were. Thursday afternoon the beggars started coming to your house, and you would give them each a penny. Some of them would ask for two or yell at you if they thought that you didn't give them enough. Some people gave them a piece of bread. It wasn't always money. They came on Thursday afternoon because Friday morning the fish merchants put up their stands with the fresh fish. For the Sabbath you bought fresh fish. By Friday afternoon the fish were dead and the poor people would buy them for half price. Self-respecting people bought live fish. You didn't buy a dead fish. The fish stands had wooden tubs where the fish swam. You stuck your hand into the tub until you pulled out the fish you wanted and you weighed it. When the housewives came to buy the fish they would throw the beggars a

³³ "Melamed" is the Hebrew word for teacher. The melamed usually taught elementary Hebrew and therefore was not respected like a rabbi or a scholar. He was frequently regarded as unworldly and impractical. As Ida suggests, the word was sometimes used pejoratively to refer to people who were not teachers to imply that they were incompetent or impractical. Many melamdin were poor teachers, and many became teachers after failing at other endeavors. Rosten, *Joys*, 231-232.

penny too. So the beggars would sit around those fish stands. By Friday evening the fish sale was over so they would start going from house to house to collect pennies and pieces of bread. There was a very rich man in Siedlce who had a big hardware business. The beggars would go to him and give him their money to hold for them, because they didn't want to hold it. Some poor people who didn't beg, like a poor tailor who was saving money for a dowry for his daughter, would go to this rich man and ask him to hold their money. The rich man was supposed to pay these people interest. He was like a bank. But he didn't pay them much. The water carriers also gave him money to hold. People asked them: "What does he pay you for the money you give him?" And the water carrier would say: "For interest I carry his water." They paid him interest to hold their money. One day he went bankrupt and it was terrible. There were hundreds of people sitting in front of his house because all their savings had disappeared.

The beggars had names, and we knew them by their names. There was one man who was called the Shtimmer, the mute, because he didn't talk. He would go around Friday night with a big sack. Children were afraid of him, because parents would say if you don't go to sleep the Shtimmer is going to come and take you away in his big sack. Every Friday night he knocked on the door. You could hear him walk heavy up the steps and knock. Friday night when it was already Sabbath you couldn't handle money, so you opened the door and you gave him bread. He would get a piece of challah, and he would eat it all week.³⁴ They used to say that there was a very stingy man in town and that when the Shtimmer knocked on his door he would say, "Come in, come in, you have

³⁴ Challah is a braided bread, soft and slightly sweet, usually glazed on top with egg white, that is served on Sabbath and holidays.

bread, I have borscht, we can both eat." Then there were the crazy people. They were really crazy, and they were walking around loose. Some of them were really kind of dangerous. Some of them were from nice families who kept them home. I had a girlfriend who lived on the second floor of a house, and on the first floor was a family whose son was crazy. His name was Usha. They kept him home, but sometimes he would get out of the house and we would be afraid to go out because he would jump on you and scream and shout. There was one crazy man who was very quiet. He would go around and talk to himself. He would say, "I can understand everything. I know how they make a house from bricks. The only thing I cannot understand is how they make applesauce from apples. How do they do this?" He went around like this for years. There were no mental hospitals. If someone was crazy, he would just run around. My father told us there once was a crazy man who ran up on the roof of a house and was going to jump off, and people were trying to get him down but couldn't. Another crazy man came by and took out a little pocket knife and said to the man on the roof, "See this knife? If you don't come down, I am going to cut down the building and you will fall down." The man came down. Later they said that one meshuggener knows how to handle another.³⁵ No one in his right mind would think of saying he is going to cut down the house.

In the Jewish community there was a lot of cultural activity. We had two weekly Yiddish newspapers, and a Jewish club with a small orchestra, an amateur theater and a big library. This club was supposed to be a cultural club; the only game was supposed to

³⁵ "Meshuggener" is the Yiddish word for a crazy man. It comes from the Hebrew "meshuga" which means insane or crazy.

be dominos, but a few men got in who were card players and they turned it into a gambling club. People played a lot of poker there, and a lot of people lost money but the club kept functioning. The younger people didn't care too much about all this though, especially the educated ones.

I went to a government school for girls, the Queen Jadwiga School. It was a very fancy school but for a Jewish girl to get in was very hard. I got in because my father had friends in the Justice Department because of his work in the prison. My brothers went to the equivalent boys school. There were only two Jewish girls allowed in each class - that was the limit. There was also a private high school and a lot of Jews, like Sarah, David's sister, went there.³⁶ When she was in her last year, the school was closed because it was very anti-government.

In the last few years before the war, Poland had a government which supposedly did not tolerate anti-Semitism.³⁷ The government was supposed to be liberal, but the

³⁶ In February 1919 the Polish government made elementary education compulsory for all children aged seven to fourteen. Joseph Marcus, Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919-1939 (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1983), 148. During the inter-war period, approximately eighty percent of Jewish children in elementary school attended the free public schools where classes were conducted in Polish. Heller, Edge, 223. Elementary schools for Jewish children were usually only created in communities where there were many Jews, and where they agreed on the type of instruction to be offered. High school was neither compulsory nor free. Public high schools operated by the national or local governments had high standards but admitted few Jews; Jewish parents who wanted their children to get a high school education frequently had to sacrifice to pay the higher tuition for a lesser quality private high school. In 1921-22 there were 48,849 Jewish high school students in Poland, 23.7% of the total high school population; their enrollment declined to 33,212, or 16.5% of the total in 1936-37. In 1936-37, 73% of the Jewish high school students attended private schools; two-thirds of the non-Jewish students went to public high schools. *Idem*, 229-230.

³⁷ Actually, the years prior to the war were marked by an increase in anti-Semitism, partly due to the influence of Nazism, partly due to the death of Marshal Pilsudski in 1935. To compete with the National Democrats, the Endecja, Pilsudski's movement, the Sanacja, moved to the right. In 1936 the prime minister approved and the Catholic Church supported a boycott of Jewish businesses. In 1937 the Sejm passed laws restricting ritual slaughter and segregating Jewish university students on "ghetto benches." That same year Pilsudski's successors formed the Camp of National Unity (OZON), which excluded Jews and demanded that their economic and cultural influence be reduced. Both the government and the church officially condemned violence against the Jews, but attacks were common and seldom

private school the Jews went to was extremely anti-Semitic. The two sisters who owned the school were leaders of the anti-Semitic party, but they made a living from the Jews who paid them money for their daughters to study. Finally, the government closed the school and said that all the students from that school should go to the government school so they could graduate. So we got seven or eight Jewish girls in my class, but normally there were only one or two.

Religion was taught in the schools. There were priests and they taught Catholicism. I felt strange at first but later on, when I got friendly with the kids, it was better. The first few years were very tough because some of the kids were anti-Semites who would point at you and call you names, especially in my first year, when I was eight. Before that I went to a private school which had three grades, starting with kindergarten.

At the government school we wore uniforms to school - pleated navy skirts with navy sailor blouses in winter and white sailor blouses in summer. Over this we wore an apron with a finely pleated ruffle and a bib. Silk stockings weren't allowed - we could only wear brown or black tights. Boys went to a different school and also wore uniforms and long navy Russian coats and hats. They had bars on the sleeves showing what class they were in.

There were about thirty girls in a class. It was very hard. We went to school six days a week from eight to two. Sometimes, in the higher grades, we had to stay later for a lab. At noon, for lunch, they would bring out a table with sandwiches, donuts, and a big samovar of tea. You could bring your own sandwich or buy lunch at school. In your

punished. Emanuel Melzer, "Antisemitism in the Last Years of the Second Polish Republic" in The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars, ed. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz and Chone Shmeruk (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 128-132.

fourth or fifth year you had to choose between a science curriculum and a humanities curriculum. In the humanities you took Latin and a lot of history and literature. In the sciences there was a lot of math, chemistry, physics, etc. I chose science, but if you chose science you could still take Latin. My parents thought I should do that so twice a week I would stay later in the afternoon to take Latin along with the science classes.

We also had classes in drawing and painting. The teacher would put up a model and while we drew she would read to us about different artists, so we learned about art history. We mostly learned about Renaissance and Baroque art and Italian and French art. We learned about Polish artists too, but I don't remember any Pole who was particularly famous as an artist. Three times a week we did needlework - fancy embroidery, not sewing. A lady was supposed to know how to do this.

We also had singing classes but I had a lot of problems with that class because I couldn't sing. You had to stand up and sing solo so the teacher could assess your voice. Finally my mother went to the doctor and got a note that said when they took out my tonsils they damaged something so I shouldn't strain my vocal cords, so I was excused from singing. I was also terrible in physical education.

The school was pretty strict. We had to be there at exactly eight a.m.; after that the doors were locked. If you came late you had to ring the bell and the porter would open the door and you had to go to the teacher's room and explain why you were late. We weren't allowed to wear our shoes during the day; we had to change into soft-soled slippers so we wouldn't make noise when we ran. So the school was very quiet and the floors were polished, and there were white embroidered curtains at the windows.

Everybody had a little table to sit at, with an ink well. Most of my teachers were single women; a few, like the math and physics teachers, were men.

The school year was not divided into semesters. We had tests all year and four times a year we got grades. Tests were graded from one to five with five the highest. Every day part of each class was devoted to calling on students and asking them questions. In math class students would go up to the blackboard and do problems. We did not have clubs or extra-curricular activities like newspapers or debate clubs or sports teams. Most of the time was devoted to study.

School started at the beginning of September and continued until the end of June. We had two weeks off for Christmas and one week for Easter. The Catholic girls had to go to school on Sunday morning too. They had to be there at nine dressed for church, and they would march in twos with the teachers to church for services. If they didn't come they had to have an excuse. The Jewish girls didn't have to go to religion class or to Sunday services. We could go to the class if we wanted but most of us had something else to do. I was very happy when religion was the first period because I could sleep late and come to school an hour later. There was a regular school chaplain and a crucifix in every classroom. Every day started with a prayer. All the Catholic children stood up and bowed their heads and prayed. The Jewish kids didn't bow their heads, but they stood up too. The last period ended with a prayer too, no matter what the subject was.

In 1931, about two years before I graduated, the Jewish senators demanded religious education for the Jewish kids too.³⁸ The government agreed and hired Jewish

³⁸ I was unable to find any reference to a 1931 law, but Heller mentions that after 1934 "religious instruction became compulsory for all students in primary and secondary schools." Heller, *Edge*, 189.

teachers to do it. The classes were held between nine and eleven on Sunday when the Catholic kids went to church. So now we also had to come on Sunday morning. We hated this and hated the teacher. It was not his fault but Sunday was spoiled for us, so we did not greatly appreciate this Jewish education.

The religious services and crucifixes in the schools did not bother us, but the question of names did. In Poland the Jews were not allowed to have regular names; they had to have Jewish names. You could not be named Helen, you had to be Chaya. Boys could not be Melvin or Maurice, they had to be Moshe. The names stuck out and hurt children badly, because the Catholic kids made fun of the Jewish names. Here you might call someone Jewish a "kike" as an insult; there they would say a "Moshe", which meant a Jew. At the beginning of the school year the teacher would want to learn the kids' names and we each had to stand up and say our name. I remember that, to me and others, it was one of the most humiliating experiences. Everybody else had regular names like Mary or Helen. Sometimes they would also ask your father's name, and it was the same thing. It was Moshe or Shlomo, not Moses or Solomon, because they had some kind of law about Jewish names.³⁹

You had to say what your parents did, which was also embarrassing. It's not embarrassing to be the daughter of a merchant but when everybody else is the daughter of

³⁹ I have not found any mention of a law requiring Jews to have Jewish names. Probably most had Jewish names because of religious tradition, but in the inter-war years, many younger middle class people began to Polonize their names. However, because the names often came from the Old Testament, they revealed one's Jewishness even when they were Polonized. Assimilated Jews use Polish names rather than Polonized Jewish names. *Ibid.*, 216-217.

a railroad man or civil servant you stick out.⁴⁰ That's why a lot of people tried to get away.

The Jewish last names were also different. Poland was not a mixture of many nations. There were only Poles and Jews.⁴¹ The Poles all had Polish names and the Jews had their names, which they were not allowed to change. Many of these names, like Tenenbaum, were German and were OK, but some of them were pretty funny, maybe because they were originally given as a joke.

Still, kids are kids, and after a few years I had some real good Polish friends. We grew up together and the corners rubbed off. Besides, I had good grades in math and they all needed a little help. During the war when the Germans came some turned out to be real friends, and some didn't. One girl who was often at our house eating and drinking turned out to be a real rat when the war came. Her father was a civil servant who was imprisoned because he embezzled a lot of money. My father gave him a job in the prison office and gave her shoes to wear, but she turned out to be a real rat.

We had to study French or German in school. I picked French because I had started learning it long before I got to school. We had a neighbor who was a widow, and she taught young ladies French so they would be fluent in the social graces. She would take little kids also, so my mother enrolled me. It was mostly conversational, so I spoke

⁴⁰ Discriminatory hiring practices kept Jews out of jobs in transportation and the civil service. Ibid., 100.

⁴¹ Actually there were several large ethnic minorities in inter-war Poland. The largest minority were the Ukrainians, who numbered 4.5 million. Jews numbered about 3.5 million, Belorussians 1 million, Germans 740,000. Thus, almost a third of Poland's thirty million people were not Polish. Tec, When Light, 14.

French, but couldn't write it, so later in school I took French. Eventually my French was as good as my Polish, and this was useful later.

Kids did not take a lot of lessons like they do here. By the time you came home from school and had dinner - and twice a week you had to go back for lab - and did your homework, there really wasn't much time. The only thing I took was French lessons because my mother insisted. I don't know if a lot of Jewish kids even did this; all of the kids that went to this lady were Christians.

I didn't learn any other living languages. I studied Latin because my parents wanted me to. I had to learn to recite the beginning of the Iliad in Greek because our literature teacher wanted us to know how it sounded in Greek. It is written in hexameter, and she wanted us to understand the tempo, the sound. But I didn't study Greek as a language.

In the summer when school was out we would rent little houses in the pine woods from the farmers and lie in the hammocks and read books and talk and sing and play games or take walks. The mothers would go with the children and the fathers would come on the weekends. It was fairly primitive. There was no indoor plumbing and no refrigeration. If you wanted to keep something cold, you had to put it in the cellar. There were lots of flies because of the cows. It wasn't too comfortable but we had a good time. Poor people stayed in town and their children hung around. If the father had a store, they might help him make little bags from newspapers and paste. They didn't have brown bags like stores here.

We had electricity at home, but no indoor plumbing. They started to put in sewers, and some streets had them, but you couldn't connect the houses because you

couldn't run pipes through the houses, because they had solid masonry walls, so they tried to connect outhouses to the sewers instead. We had sinks with drains, but no faucets. We got water from a water carrier; he had a piece of wood on his shoulders from which hung two pails, which he filled with water from the pump on the street. Usually the janitor of the building performed this function. Every morning, after washing the steps of the house, he went and got water. You paid him extra for this. In the summer the work wasn't that hard, but in the winter the water pump was surrounded by ice, and the water carriers had to walk to it. There was one who wore shoes with soles about five inches tall. Whenever he found a piece of leather he would nail it to the soles because he was a short man and he wanted to be taller.

People stored the water in pails or barrels. Some of the barrels were beautiful. They were wooden and decorated with copper rings and copper nails. They had a cover with copper hinges that opened halfway, and they stood on three legs.

Our janitor was a deaf old man named Jan. When it was time to wash we gave Jan a week's notice so he would have enough time to bring the extra water we needed. He would come thirty or forty times a day. For washing we had a special tub which was tall and round. It had a hole in the bottom with a stopper so you could put a pail under it and drain it. We had two of these, a big one and a small one, and one of them had a wringer attached. At night we filled the tub with soapy water and soaked the linens. The next day the washerwomen would come and wash the linens and put them in big pots of water to boil on the stove. After the boiling the linens were scrubbed again and rinsed. By then it would be night time so we would put them in a tub with cold water and bleach and let them soak. The next day we would rinse them and blue them and hang them.

Hanging the laundry was difficult. Every apartment building had an empty attic, and lines were put there for hanging clothes. You could also hang them outside but then you had to watch them to make sure no one would dirty them. Once the linens were dry, the women would fold them and bring them to the mangle. This was a big device with polished wooden rollers that was used to iron the linens. You put the linens on the rollers and turned a wheel and the linens went through the rollers and came out pressed and smooth as silk.

It took two days to wash the linens and three or four days to iron them, so we didn't do the wash every week. In fact, we went all winter without washing linens. We would just rinse out a few things. Every year before Pesach we did a big wash, and it took a week. We had to make reservations with the washerwomen and for the hanging space in the attic. That's why people had so many linens. Here people can have two bedsheets. We had to have dozens. You could have fifty men's shirts to iron. People didn't change linens or clothes as much as now. Men wore shirts two or three days. People changed the sheets every two or three weeks. We had no electric irons. Our irons had an opening where we put a piece of hot metal, a piece of cast iron made to fit the opening. We had two of these pieces. We would heat one in the stove until it turned red and then pick it up with a poker and put it in the iron. The iron would get hot and we would iron until it cooled. While we ironed, the other piece heated in the stove and when the first piece cooled, we removed it and put in the second. Tailors used irons heated by coal which was put inside the irons. They would blow into the iron to make it hot, and the embers stayed warm even when the coal cooled. When the iron was needed the tailor

could blow into it and heat it up again. Kids who were learning to be tailors spent most of the first year blowing into irons to heat them.

We cooked on a stove made of bricks. The bricks were glazed and very pretty. Some were ornamental like Dutch tiles. The top was iron. The only way to regulate the oven temperature when we baked was by putting in or taking out coals. There was no thermostat.

To bathe we had to warm pots of water and pour them into a tub. We bathed only once a week because it was so much trouble. The rest of the time we washed using a big bowl of water. We washed our hair the same way but had to have someone pour water on it to rinse it. When I was fourteen or fifteen I started going to a beauty parlor to get my hair done because I had straight hair and, at that time, curls were the rage.

In the afternoon after school I would go to a girlfriend's house or friends would come to my house and we would do homework together. We had a lot of homework. We sat in the dining room and worked on a big table that everybody used. My mother usually had something to do, like darn socks.

At seven p.m. we ate "colatsia", dinner. This was a light meal - cold cuts, cheese or sour cream in the summer. We bought bread three times a day, and there were special bakeries where we bought rolls for the evening meal. Usually I would go and buy them. After the meal, some neighbor or an aunt would usually come over to have a glass of tea with cake. There was a lot of socializing. People played cards a lot. In our house we didn't because my father didn't play cards but we played dominoes or checkers or chess. We had Chinese checkers too. We also listened to the radio. At nine or nine-thirty I would go to bed. When I was older and out of school it was different. We would go out

at night, boys and girls would walk up and down the streets, but during school we mostly did homework.

There were shops on the first floor of most buildings. My mother cooked and every morning she went to the butcher's to buy the meat. While she shopped, the maid would clean the house. I remember I used to like so much when I had a cold and stayed home from school because the smells and the sounds of the house were so nice. I would sleep and when I awoke the house was quiet and I could smell food cooking in the kitchen. The house would smell fresh because the maid would have just cleaned and polished the floors and my mother would be home from shopping. On the way she would meet the neighbors and tell everybody I was home with a cold and everybody would give her medical advice. My aunts would come and give me hot tea with preserves. Then around three some girlfriends would come from school and bring the homework because if you were back in school the next day you had to have it done.

We were not religious so we didn't celebrate the holidays very much. On Yom Kippur I didn't fast. We did not have a Christmas tree, but I used to help friends make ornaments because I liked to fool around with paper. Chanukah and Purim were not big holidays.⁴² We didn't even have a menorah. We ate latkes, but they were not especially associated with Chanukah. We didn't celebrate Purim much either. At one time my

⁴² Chanukah, the Feast of Lights, commemorates the victory in 167 B.C. of the Maccabees over Antiochus IV and the Syrians who defiled the Temple and tried to convert the Jews. Chanukah, which means dedication in Hebrew, is called that because after their victory the Maccabees rededicated the Temple. Legend has it that they found a little oil which miraculously lasted eight days, long enough to purify more oil for the lights in the Temple. Chanukah lasts eight days and is celebrated by lighting candles on a special candelabra, the menorah, giving gifts, and eating potato pancakes called latkes. Rosten, *Joys*, 71-72.

Purim, the Feast of Lots, commemorates the failure of a plot to kill the Jews of Persia. Haman, the vizier of King Ahasuerus, had decided to kill the Jews and drew lots to pick the day. The Jews were saved by the intervention of Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai. On Purim the megillah, the Scroll of Esther,

father had a business partner who used to give a big party at Purim and we would go. Pesach was an important holiday, and Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Pesach we had matzo, but we didn't have two sets of dishes. We had a seder, but it was more a special meal than a reading of the Hagadah. We did not invite people to the seder. It was always within the family. Everybody had the seder in his own house. It wasn't a big family celebration. Religious Jews, like my in-laws, also celebrated Succoth.⁴³ Most houses had a door on the roof that could be opened so some people would set up a succah on the roof. We didn't keep kosher, but my brothers were circumcised and they had bar mitzvahs in Shefland's shul.

Very few Jewish kids got a higher education. Most of those who did went to law school when they graduated from high school.⁴⁴ My father wanted me to do that too. It was hard to get into medical school, but law school was very easy to get into. There were a lot of Jewish lawyers in Poland.⁴⁵ The Poles thought the Jews were better as lawyers.

is read in the synagogue, and people dress up and give gifts to friends and to the poor. Idem, 295-296.

⁴³ Succoth is the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths. It begins five days after Yom Kippur and lasts eight days. Families build booths (succah) outside and eat in them to recall the booths the Jews lived in as they wandered in the desert forty years after leaving Egypt. The booths are typically decorated with fruit and foliage and the roofs are open so one can see the sky. Ibid., 382-383.

⁴⁴ In 1929 there were about 76,000 university graduates in Poland, of whom 32,000 were Jewish. Jews thus constituted 42% of all university graduates, a significant proportion which declined dramatically in the 1930's. Marcus, *Social*, 66-67. In 1921-22, 8426 Jewish students were attending university, 24.3% of all university students; by 1937-38 the number had declined to 4791, 9.9% of the total university population. Idem, 160. The decline was largely attributable to assaults, harassment, and Jewish quotas. Tec, *When Light*, 17. Another contributing factor was the decrease in the number of Jewish secondary schools, as Jewish parents had an increasingly difficult time paying the high tuition of these private schools. Marcus, *Social*, 160-161.

Approximately two-thirds of the Jewish students who finished high school went to university. Of these, about a third studied law, economics, and political science, another third studied humanities and sciences, and a tenth studied medicine. Idem, 160.

⁴⁵ Of the 20,000 law school graduates in Poland in 1929, 6500 were Jewish. Almost half – 3200 – were in private practice, while only 4800 of the 13,500 non-Jewish law graduates were in private practice. This distribution was attributable to discriminatory practices which kept Jews out of the civil service and the judiciary. "Jewish lawyers were simply reinforcing the already overcrowded ranks of private advocates."

In law school you could stay home and study; you only had to go to school for the exams. You didn't have to go to class. In the middle of the year you went for a day or two just to listen to a lecture or two but you could buy the mimeographed lectures; the school gave them to you.

Law school was easy to get into, but at the end you came to a dam. They passed you, but when you finished you couldn't put up a shingle like here. You had to go through several apprenticeships. First, you had to spend two years as a law clerk in a district court. You had to write briefs and take notes and do all kinds of things and pass exams all along the way. There were not many district courts, and every judge needed only one clerk, so there was a limited number of openings. People paid money to get these positions. By the time you finished the two years, you knew all the court procedures. You took the final exam and if you passed you could become a judge. Then you needed another two years to be an apprentice to a lawyer to learn how a lawyer works.

Everyone wanted to be apprenticed to a good lawyer. The lawyer had to get permission to have an apprentice. How many could a lawyer have? One or two was the most unless he had a really big office. There weren't so many lawyers. People didn't use that many lawyers. They didn't sue that much. So there was a struggle to become an apprentice. Again, it was very expensive. People paid a lot of money to become an apprentice. It was illegal, but they did it. You worked for the lawyer for nothing and then you had to pass a hard bar exam. I had five or six friends who had law degrees and never worked anyplace. Another problem was that they investigated you. One boy's

father did something so the boy was permanently blackballed. He never could get in a court. He later took a job with a newspaper.

I was never interested in politics when I was young; at that time it was mostly men who were involved in politics. A woman's situation then was entirely different. Women didn't work. Women didn't go to engineering schools or schools like that which were considered a man's domain. There were some women involved in politics, like Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, but those were women who were particularly fiery personalities, who were fighters.⁴⁶ Maybe I wasn't that kind, or maybe I wasn't raised that way. I went to a girl's school where we sat behind lace curtains and wore slippers. They taught us things because they wanted us to have a good education, but they didn't teach us to be fighters and they didn't teach us about politics. I imagine the history they taught us was doctored too.

Despite this I was a little bit of a rebel. When we had to write essays in school the teacher would give us a choice among different subjects, and I would always pick one which had to do with social issues. She would complain about it to my parents. But generally, I was considered quiet and shy. I wasn't very outgoing; I never took part in plays. If I had to say something in public, I was very intimidated. I led a very sheltered life. I couldn't go out after dark until I was seventeen. I was so meek that if I had to go someplace, or pay a bill, I could hardly speak. Maybe if I had been a poor girl whose father was a shoemaker or a tailor, who didn't have money to buy a dress, who had the

⁴⁶ Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) helped found the Social Democratic Party of Poland in the 1890's. In 1898 she moved to Germany, where she became a leader of the revolutionary left-wing of the German Socialist movement. She participated in the 1905-06 revolution in Warsaw, was jailed but escaped and resumed her political activity in Germany. She was an editor of the Communist newspaper there when she was arrested and killed by army officers on January 15, 1919. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Rosa

brains to become something but could not get anywhere because of the conditions, maybe that would have gotten my dander up and I would have done something. There were some women who did. A lot of women got involved in Zionism and went to kibbutzim.⁴⁷ They figured that if they had their own country, nobody could tell them that they could not be a doctor or a lawyer or whatever they wanted to be. But mainly it was men.

The career situation for Jews was almost hopeless. It was very hard for a Jew to make himself a place if he did not want to do what his father did, which meant have a little grocery or shop, and the feeling was that if you separated yourself and tried to mix in with the Poles your chances were better. Jews seldom converted, but they became reform Jews.⁴⁸ My father, even then, didn't wear a beard. Poland had "numerus clausus" and "numerus nullus" in its schools. "Numerus clausus" meant that there was a certain

Luxemburg."

⁴⁷ Modern political Zionism developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, largely as a response to European anti-Semitism. Its goal was the creation of a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, the ancient home of the Jewish people. Zionism was largely advanced by Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), a Viennese Jew who became a journalist and served as Paris correspondent of the Viennese Neue Freie Presse from 1891 to 1895. Witnessing the Dreyfus trial convinced Herzl that assimilation would not end European anti-Semitism; the only solution was a separate Jewish state. In 1896 he published Der Judenstaat to express his ideas. In 1897 he convened the first Zionist congress, forerunner of the World Zionist Organization which he then served as president. He also founded the weekly Die Welt to promote the Zionist idea. Despite disappointments, setbacks, and heart disease, Herzl worked tirelessly until the end of his life to achieve his goal. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Theodor Herzl"; Charles D. Smith, Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 4th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 38-39.

Kibbutzim is the plural of "kibbutz," the word for "collective" in Hebrew. A kibbutz is a voluntary collective settlement, usually agricultural but sometimes with an industrial component. The kibbutzim embodied the socialist and Zionist ideals of the early settlers of Israel who wanted to build an egalitarian society and to re-connect the Jews to the land. Originally, members could not have any private assets and the collective took care of all their needs. As they have evolved, the kibbutzim have diversified in social organization and have given their members more autonomy. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Kibbutz."

⁴⁸ Estimates of the number of conversions among Polish Jews in the late 1920's and early 1930's range from 2000 to 5000. The conversion rate was high among assimilated Jews and very low among other Jews. Generally, even secularized Jews refrained from converting. Jews who converted generally did so for practical reasons, to gain access to positions closed to Jews. Heller, Edge, 196. While few Jews converted, many young people rejected the traditional Jewish way of life. They spoke Polish, which they learned in elementary school, rather than Yiddish; they abandoned the traditional dress and joined the new

quota or number of Jews allowed. "Numerus nullus" meant that no Jews were allowed at all. Some universities had one rule, some the other.⁴⁹

So there were a lot of young people with nothing to do. There were young men who graduated from law school who didn't have the money to buy a cigarette. The father might have strained to send the son to school, and after years of work the son couldn't do anything, couldn't earn a dollar. It was a sad situation. Here I can't imagine it, but over there it wasn't so bad because the living standard was lower: you could get by with a lot less. We had no cars or televisions or fancy trips so we didn't miss them. It wasn't a shame to live at home with your parents when you were thirty years old. All you needed to buy was a suit and maybe some cigarettes. Here if you want to take a girl out and you don't have a car and you don't have money to take her to a restaurant you are a dead duck. Over there it wasn't like that. When we would go places, David would pay for everybody. He had a business and had money. It was no big deal. We would all sit down and eat, and he would pay the bill because he could afford it. Maybe the others felt a little bad at first, but after a while they didn't even feel bad.

There was very little drinking. Almost everyone smoked a lot. Dope was completely unknown. I didn't even know what it was. I remember a doctor's wife who

ideological movements sweeping Poland. In another country they might have become Reform Jews, but the Reform movement was never institutionalized in Poland. *Idem*, 189.

⁴⁹ "Numerus clausus" means a closed number, a quota. "Numerus nullus" means no number, or none. These terms refer generally to measures limiting the number of people admitted to a certain institution or profession. In inter-war Poland they were used to limit the number of Jews admitted to the universities. Poles considered a university education a privilege, and some were unhappy that the percentage of Jews in the university population exceeded the percentage of Jews in the general population. Nationalists, especially the students among them, demanded Jewish quotas. Informal quotas appeared at some universities in 1924 but Polish students continued to agitate for an official quota at all universities. To appease them, the government finally instituted an official quota, but the students were still not satisfied. They pressured the government into approving separate seating for Jews in October 1937 and then demanded the complete exclusion of Jews. *Ibid.*, 120-123.

was very ill who was taking morphine. Later people whispered that she had to go to some other country for treatment because she had become a morphine addict. There were just a lot of young people with nothing to do and no place to go. What they would do is read books and walk the streets and sit and talk.

They were depressed, but they were either psychologically stronger than people are now, or they just didn't know any better. I imagine if things were like this today, the suicide rate would probably be bad. It was very hard to emigrate. There were quotas. The only people who could come to the U.S. were those with family here.⁵⁰ A lot of young people went to France to study because it was easier to get into school there, but when they came back they had to pass lots of exams. I had two cousins, my father's brother's two sons, who studied in France, one in Grenoble, one in Nancy. One was a chemical engineer who specialized in paper-making. The other was in wine-making and beer-making. The one who studied paper-making got a job in Poland because Poland has a lot of trees. The other one never got a job. They couldn't stay in France because it was not easy for foreigners to get jobs there. You needed special work papers. They let you study in a university because you paid your way, but you couldn't get a job. I had a friend who studied engineering in Germany and he couldn't get a job there, so he came back to Poland. Russia was Communist and they had enough of their own people. Few people went to Russia unless they were Communists.

⁵⁰ The 1924 immigration law, the Johnson Act, established an immigration quota of two percent of the number of foreign-born persons of each nationality resident in the United States in 1890. That year was intentionally chosen because it preceded the mass immigrations of Italians, Slavs, and Russian Jews. Howard M. Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1958), 313-314.

People were involved in Zionism because they saw Zionism as their only hope. There were so many Jewish young people with no future. It wasn't a question of going to school. There were a lot of boys who went to college and graduated but couldn't get jobs.⁵¹ Also, Zionism was a new idea. Herzl wrote in the late 1890's so it was brand new. It caught the fancy of a lot of people. People were aware of the anti-Semitism in Poland. But very few people with degrees were Zionists.⁵² They just didn't believe in it. Zionism attracted mainly the poorer people. The Hashomer were all people from poorer homes.⁵³ David was on the board of the Hashomer, but he didn't go to the hahsharas.⁵⁴ He helped arrange them. The hahsharas were like communes. They were set up to prepare the young people for life in Palestine. They knew they were going to have to work on the land because the Keren Kayemet was buying the land.⁵⁵ Landowners who

⁵¹ According to Marcus, "To many [Jews], especially after 1929, the long and costly years of education and the achievement of professional status brought only frustration, if not misery, instead of fulfillment and satisfaction." Marcus, Social, 68.

Menachem Begin, leader of the militant Zionist organization Betar in Poland and later Prime Minister of Israel from 1977 to 1983, received his law degree from Warsaw University in 1935 and recalled that once he and other Jewish students finished the university, "...we had no future. We couldn't get jobs as lawyers, we couldn't do anything." Abram Sachar, The Redemption of the Unwanted (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1983), 229.

⁵² Heller says that Zionism became the strongest political movement among Jews in inter-war Poland because it appealed to Jews of different classes and different degrees of acculturation. She contends that it attracted many acculturated middle-class Jews. Heller, Edge, 266.

⁵³ Hashomer Hatzair was a Zionist socialist youth movement whose objective was to educate Jewish youth for kibbutz life in Palestine. Founded in 1913, it had about 40,000 members by the 1930's, of whom twenty percent lived in Poland. Marcus, Social, 278. The movement attracted educated middle-class youth as well as working class youth. Heller, Edge, 267.

⁵⁴ "Hakhsharah" or "hahshara" is the Hebrew word for "preparation." Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Hakhsharah." The hahshara were programs organized to train young Jews for life on agricultural settlements in Palestine. Many Jewish youth in Poland were enthusiastic about moving to Palestine and building a Jewish homeland there through physical labor. They would leave home and live for a year or two at the hahsharah, usually a farm or workshop in Poland, where they learned to milk cows, grow food, etc. Heller, Edge, 270.

⁵⁵ Keren Kayemet is the Hebrew name of the Jewish National Fund, established at the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901 to coordinate land purchases in Palestine. Smith, Palestine, 124. With the

had big farms agreed to take in groups of these young people and let them work on the land so they could learn. The working conditions were dismal. The landowners didn't pay well. They worked the young people like slaves and hardly fed them. Many of them got sick. Some of them stayed on the hahsharas a year or two because there was a quota on immigration to Palestine and the quota was very slim.⁵⁶ They would try to get around it by bringing boys who were born in Palestine to Poland to marry Polish Jewish girls. They would put the girls on their passport and when they got to Palestine they would get divorced. That way they could use the quota just for boys.

People who had a little more money and a high school diploma went as students, which was legal. You had to have fifty pounds sterling in cash and someone willing to sign that they would support you once you got there. They got people to sign the papers and they would get together fifty pounds, and they used to say that sometimes the fifty pounds would come back and another person would use them. A girlfriend of mine went, and when she got off the boat they took the fifty pounds away from her and gave the money to someone else to use. It was like rented money to get people to Palestine to

contributions it received, the Fund also drained land, planted trees, and installed modern water supply systems. Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Jewish National Fund."

⁵⁶ I was unable to determine what restrictions on immigration existed prior to the issuance of the White Paper of 1939. When Great Britain was awarded the mandate over Palestine in April 1920, Article 6 enjoined it to "facilitate Jewish immigration" while "ensuring that the rights and position of the other sections of the population are not prejudiced." Smith, *Palestine*, 106, 108. From 1919 to 1921, almost 20,000 Jews entered Palestine. Idem, 113. Most were middle-class Jews from Poland. Idem, 119. Immigration decreased in the mid-1920's but increased again in the 1930's, when approximately 300,000 Jews arrived. Thus, in 1939-40, the 467,000 Jews in Palestine represented 30% of the country's population, a significant increase from the 10% they represented in 1919. Idem, 149. Between 1933 and 1935 the Jewish population of Palestine doubled. Almost half of the new arrivals were Polish; most were middle-class and settled in cities rather than on agricultural settlements. Idem, 133. Arabs protested the increase in Jewish immigration from the outset, but their anger erupted in major revolts in 1936 and 1937. The British quelled the revolts, but their fear that further violence would tie down troops they might need in the imminent European war and their desire to gain the support of the Arabs led them to issue the 1939 White Paper, which, "in a stunning reversal of policy," restricted Jewish immigration to 15,000 annually for the next five years. Idem, 144, 147.

work on the Keren Kayemet land. It was through David's work on the Hashomer board that some of those who were later big shots in Israel knew him, but he never went on a hahshara. Those who went were mostly young people whose fathers were tradesmen, who didn't want to end up like their fathers, who got tuberculosis from blowing into hot irons. I don't think there was much desire on the part of the more educated to go there.

About ten or fifteen percent of the Polish Jews had opportunities. The rest were not totally without jobs, but they couldn't do what they wanted to do. There were thousands of tailors and dressmakers and shoemakers and carpenters and locksmiths and mechanics with higher education. With those jobs they made a living, according to the standards of the times. They supported families and they lived. It wasn't luxurious. People did not have closets full of clothes; people did not have cars. Many grocers lived behind their store in one room with three or four children. They didn't have three bedrooms and four baths. They would live in one or two rooms. A lot of them were peddlers. Four days a week they would peddle their goods in the countryside and two days they would sell at the markets. The farmers used to come to town to market twice a week, Tuesdays and Fridays, and there were halls, big buildings, where these peddlers would rent space and sell the farmers things they needed - handkerchiefs and bandanas, needles and thread.

A man with education was more likely not to earn a cent than a man without, because the uneducated one would take any job he could get and probably make a living. But a man who finished law school and could not become a lawyer took awhile to adjust himself mentally to taking a job in an office or someplace. In Warsaw there were big

stores, there were offices, there were import houses, there were newspapers. You could get a job there and people did get jobs.

My mother was born in 1888 and married in 1910, at age twenty-two. My father was born in 1886. Their first child was a boy who only lived two days. I was born in 1914 and a brother Samuel was born in 1916. He died from a ruptured appendix in 1932, when he was sixteen. Then there was Wit - his real name was David - who was born in 1921. He was born at home on a Friday night. I was seven and I remember the running and screaming when he was born.

After my brother Samuel died in 1932, my mother devoted herself totally to the orphanage in Siedlce. Totally. She had been involved with it before, but now she spent much more time there. She was on the national board.

My father hardly went to the factory after Samuel's death. They put a Torah in the room where he died, and my father had men from his shul come there and say prayers for a whole year.⁵⁷ He didn't pray himself. He just let them do it.

Samuel was the closest to me. We were just two years apart. We both took sick the same day with the flu. Everybody had it and we all recovered but he didn't, and then he got appendicitis. It was December, and the snow was high - we couldn't open the door and we couldn't get him out of the house to the hospital in Warsaw. The trains weren't running. There was no penicillin and no antibiotics at that time. If you got an infection you just had it. Sometimes they didn't even know what it was. He got this terrible pain

⁵⁷ Jewish tradition requires recital of the Kaddish, the mourner's prayer, at the funeral, for eleven months after the death, and each year on the anniversary of the death. Interestingly enough, the Kaddish glorifies God but does not mention death or resurrection. Jews came to believe that praising God would help the souls of the dead find eternal peace. Rosten, *Joys*, 162-163.

and there was no train and we couldn't do anything. He died at five in the afternoon on December 22, a week before my birthday. We knew he was going to die because he was turning black. The gangrene was going through him. Before he died some neighbors took me and Wit to their house so we wouldn't be in the house. He died the next day.

My mother had long black hair. My father never let her cut it. But when I saw her the next day, her hair was gray. Every year we used to go to the cemetery. My parents took better care of his grave than their parents'. They put a big stone on it with an inscription, and a bush started growing out from the side. My mother never let them touch this bush. At first it was like a weed but it grew bigger and bigger. Finally it was like a sapling, and in the summers it bloomed with blue flowers. Samuel had blue eyes and she would say the flowers were exactly like Samuel's eyes. The last time we went there it had really grown.

When somebody died, it was a terrible experience. Death in itself is a terrible thing, but the way the religious Jews would come in and handle it made it worse. They had some rituals that were medieval. I remember them from when my mother-in-law died. The neighbor took us away when my brother died so I never saw them until my mother-in-law died.

The Catholic funerals were beautiful because they had hearses, like the English queen's carriage. The richer you were, the fancier the hearse. Sometimes they had horses. A band would play Chopin's march and the priests would walk with the incense, followed by the family and a lot of flowers. But the Jewish funeral was different. It was terrible. They would carry the corpse in a wooden box that was painted black. It had two holes where they put sticks through to carry it. Four men from the burial society would

carry this box and run - not walk - with it like it was a shame, like the sooner they got it over with the better. The man who was in charge of this box was mentally retarded. He lived in the cemetery in a hovel, and he kept this box there. When somebody died, the burial society would tell him and then you would see him walking along the street carrying the wooden box. You knew right away that somebody had died. My mother told me that when she was a child there was an epidemic in Siedlce and the medical science of that time couldn't do anything about it. Some people said the only way to chase away the demons who were carrying this disease was to marry off this man at the cemetery. So they found a girl who was also mentally deficient and they had a wedding amid the graves in the cemetery. They bought wine and cakes and the whole town turned out. It sounds like something from the middle ages, but my mother remembered it from when she was a child so it must have happened in the 1890's. I forgot if the epidemic stopped or not.

People were still superstitious. They would put a red ribbon around the wrists of babies to protect them against the evil eye. My grandmother still believed in the evil eye. When I was a child, if I was sick she would burn feathers and say prayers and turn me around seven times and sometimes spit over her shoulder and do other black magic. If my father came in, he would get very mad and chase her out, but she would do it. Later when I got bigger I wouldn't submit, but I remember when I was a child she would do it.

But when my mother-in-law died, what they did was really terrible. She died during the war, July 14, 1940. First they put the corpse on the floor with the feet toward the door and they tied the legs with straw so the feet would stay up. That in itself was horrible. Then some women came in and cried and wailed. They made a long gown of

linen. The feet were sewn in. Some believed that this was very lucky material, so if material was left over you made something for somebody living to wear. David's father said that if there was cloth left he wanted it for David because he was the favorite son. They had some material left, so they made a nightshirt for David. The night we were taken David wore that shirt. I still have it. I kept it through all the years. They said it's very lucky. I don't know if it is or not.

The atmosphere in this room, with the women sewing and wailing and the corpse lying in the middle on the floor, was horrible. Then they didn't bury the corpse in anything. They dug a hole in the ground and pulled the corpse out of this black wood box and put it in the hole. It was really hard on the people who were alive. At least when you put a loved one in a casket you don't see what happens later, but there you saw it immediately. It was really bad.

At about the time I graduated high school, they opened a Jewish club for young people called Kadima. Kadima in Hebrew means "forward". It was supposed to be a sports club, but it was really more of a social club. Until I finished high school I led a very sheltered life. I did not go out, not even shopping with my mother. I was not allowed to walk at night alone. Then suddenly I was seventeen and out of school so my parents couldn't shelter me like that anymore. I did not know a lot of people. I just knew the girls who were in school with me, and a lot of young Jewish people in town didn't even know that I was Jewish because I had never mixed with them. There were several organizations for Jewish youth, but I didn't belong to any because if you went to the government school you could not belong to Jewish clubs. The school would expel you.

There was the Hashomer, the Zionist club. There was the B'nai B'rith.⁵⁸ They were called the Trumpeldors or Jabotinskys. Begin was a member.⁵⁹ They wore brown shirts and black ties exactly like the Nazis wore later. They were a bunch of hooligans. They were Zionists who thought they should fight, and they fought the Hashomer too. Not with words, but with fists. If the Hashomer had a picnic in the woods, they would come and beat them up. Jabotinsky was a little man who was very militaristic.⁶⁰ He always dressed in military uniform. I think he was in the Russian army. He and Trumpeldor were killed in Israel.⁶¹ The Hashomer promoted the Zionist ideal of working on the land.

⁵⁸ She means Betar, a Zionist youth group founded by Vladimir Jabotinsky in 1923. Betar is an acronym for Berit Trumpeldor. Jabotinsky, a founder of the militaristic Revisionist Zionist movement, named the group after Joseph Trumpeldor, a Zionist leader killed in 1920 while defending a Jewish village under Arab attack. Betar stressed dedication to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, emigration, and self-defense. At first it was a variation of Zionism, but in the 1930's Betar and the Zionist-Socialists began to clash, both in Palestine and out. The Zionist-Socialists called the Betar Fascists because of their brown shirts, salutes, and militaristic bent. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Betar"; Smith, Palestine, 119.

⁵⁹ Menachem Begin (1913-1993), prime minister of Israel from 1977 to 1983, was an officer in the Betar in Poland in the 1930's. Smith, Palestine, 120. When the Germans occupied Warsaw, he escaped to Vilna, where he was arrested. Released from prison in 1941, he went to Palestine in 1942. There he assumed leadership of the Revisionist Zionist underground paramilitary organization, the Irgun, which advocated and used terrorism to make the British recognize an independent Palestine. In 1948 he founded the Herut party, dedicated to the ideals of Jabotinsky, and in 1949 he was elected to the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. In May 1967 he was a minister without portfolio in the Government of National Unity but he quit in 1970 when the majority agreed to make concessions to the Arabs for peace. In 1977 he became prime minister, and in 1978 he signed the Camp David accords with Anwar Sadat, for which they both received the Nobel Peace Prize. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Menahem Begin"; Irwin Abrams, The Nobel Peace Prize and the Laureates: An Illustrated Biographical History, 1901-1987 (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1988), 223.

⁶⁰ Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940) was an orator, writer and poet. A member of the Zionist executive from 1921 until 1923, he quit because he thought Zionist leaders were capitulating to British demands. In 1925 he founded the Revisionist movement and in 1935 he broke with the World Zionist Organization to form the New Zionist Organization. Its main project was the evacuation of Jews from Eastern Europe to Palestine, illegally if necessary. Jabotinsky advocated unlimited immigration to Palestine, the creation of a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River, and the formation of a Jewish fighting force. He helped establish the Irgun, the underground paramilitary organization that fought the British and the Arabs. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Vladimir Jabotinsky."

⁶¹ Joseph Trumpeldor (1880-1920) distinguished himself as a soldier in the Russo-Japanese War and led the Zion Mule Corps, a precursor of the Jewish Legion, which fought with the British in World War I. He then worked in the He-Halutz movement in Russia preparing Jewish youth to settle in Palestine. As chairman of the movement he insisted that members get military training. In 1919 he returned to Palestine,

Jabotinsky thought they should all be soldiers and they all drilled like this. Mostly he attracted the lower class, street gang type people. Jewish kids couldn't belong to the regular Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts; they never accepted us.

When they opened this social club I went there, and I met a lot of people who were my age. It was a nice group of thirty or forty people so we kept this little club going. There were two rented rooms and we used to have parties there. I think the only sport we played was ping-pong, but we would sit and talk and joke. People didn't date the way they do now. You went places in groups. Even after high school we went out in a group. We were all about the same age, in the same class. The group grew bigger around Christmas or in the summer because several people who studied in France came home. Many of the young people couldn't get into the university in Poland, so they went to France - mostly Grenoble and Nantes. A lot of young people from our town studied in those two universities.

After I graduated from high school, I got a little more freedom at home. The maid didn't go everywhere with me. I didn't have anything to do so I would sleep late and go to the dressmaker to try on clothes and do a little shopping and in the afternoon I would visit with my girlfriends.

I had one girlfriend named Tamar who went to school with me who had a lot of family problems. Her mother had a shop where she made hats. At that time you made hats by hand. They lost money and the mother had a nervous breakdown and had to be hospitalized. Tamar was left by herself with this shop and a younger brother. I was very

where he was killed on March 1, 1920, while defending the settlement of Tel Hai from Arab attack. Trumpeldor's life inspired both Socialist youth movements and right-wing youth groups like Betar, which stressed the militaristic aspects of his ideology and work. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Joseph Trumpeldor."

close to her. I always liked to do things with my hands so I would go there and we would make hats and she would sell them. I would stay with her until the store closed at seven. We did this for about two years, until she decided to close the store. They used to be a very prominent and rich family, but they had all kinds of problems and lost their money, and finally their house was sold in an auction for taxes. When the man who bought it told them they would have to pay rent, Tamar's younger brother, who was about seventeen, got mad, grabbed a knife and stabbed him. They put him in jail. I don't know what happened to him because when the war broke out he was still in jail. She never heard from him. He was the same age as Wit, and they were friends. Tamar got very depressed because her mother wasn't getting any better, and her father was not a provider. He was an editor of one of the newspapers and he wrote poetry. There was a whole bunch of "literati" who had a room at the Jewish club where they sat and wrote poetry and newspaper articles. They were a very literary group, but as far as money goes, they didn't get any royalties or film rights. One was a hunchback who looked like Quasimodo. He edited the newspaper. They collected a big library and they ran the newspaper, but they were not very respected because they had no standing. People liked to read papers and they respected education, but they made fun of people who weren't doing something else. They called them schlemiels, melameds. They felt that they did this because they couldn't do anything else. Anyway, there was a boy who was crazy about her in Israel and he wanted her to come and she had some friends there, so she decided to leave it all and go to Israel. She left and got married and became a nurse there.

So I was left without this friend and I was still young and I wanted to be an engineer. I wanted to do something with math and science because that's what I liked.

At that time - we must have been nineteen or twenty - Sarah got the idea that she wanted to go to Israel, but first she wanted to learn dressmaking. But telling her parents that she wanted to become a dressmaker was like telling them that she wanted to convert. They used to say that "tailors and shoemakers are not people." In Warsaw there was a very fine dressmaking school, and she decided she wanted to go there. At the same time they opened an aeronautical engineering school, and I decided that I wanted to go to it. Of course we didn't have any money because girls didn't need money. If we went to a movie the boy bought the ticket and at home we had everything. We gathered our meager resources, and we went to Warsaw. We didn't have anywhere to stay. She didn't have any family there. I did have family there but I didn't want to stay with them because we had decided we wanted to be on our own. We had a friend who was a medical student in Warsaw. Since it was summer and school did not start until August, his room was empty. He told us that we could stay there, but it wasn't much of a room. There was a little iron bedstead and that was it. We stayed there about two weeks, and we had a terrible time. We didn't have any money and we were hungry and we didn't know what to do. I went to the engineering school and they looked me in the face and laughed. This Jewish girl wants to go to engineering school. Once a friend of my parents found us and took us to dinner in a place where traveling salesmen ate. They gave us big gefilte fish and we ate like two animals.

It was very depressing and I couldn't call home because my parents didn't have a telephone. The post office was our telephone. At that time if somebody wanted to call you the post office sent a man with a notice saying that you should be at the post office phone at a certain time because somebody was going to call you. David had a phone

because his family's store was below their apartment. Mostly only offices had phones. You had to run to the post office. Finally David came and said, "Well, what are you going to do? You didn't accomplish anything. You'd better come home." He bought us two tickets and we went back to Siedlce.

When I came home my parents never said a word. The whole experience left me very depressed. At that time a lot of women would get together in the afternoon and play cards and discuss maids. I never was interested. I never played cards. I helped with the store and I worked with my father in the factory, but I really wanted to be something like an engineer. There was a textile design school outside of Paris, and I was dying to go there, but my father said the only place I could go was a law school because then I could stay home and study. He said if I finished law school I wouldn't have any problem getting a position because he knew all the Justice Department people. But law was the last thing I wanted. He was very strict on this subject. When I came home from a visit someplace he would come to the station to pick me up and treat me like a lady. He would kiss my hand and bow. He was very good to me, but in his mind there were certain things that a lady didn't do. A lady didn't work. She was just supposed to stay home until she got married. The decorum was hard on me.

We finished high school at seventeen or eighteen; at nineteen or twenty women started thinking about marriage. For men, it varied. The very religious ones married very young. They studied Torah and usually they were supported by their in-laws. There were a few of these, mostly in very small towns out in the country. Then there were young men who went into the family business and took it over; they also married young and settled down. But most people were not that young when they married because the

young men had such a hard time finding work they couldn't support a family. I had a girlfriend who went with a man who had a law degree. They went together for years and never got married. He could not get a job. In those years, she finished law school and got into the court and finished her training. She had contacts and she knew how to get places. The war broke out and she didn't go any further but she would have become a lawyer.

There were a couple of matchmakers. One of them was called Vigdor Kartoffel because he also sold potatoes.⁶² People would order potatoes for the winter. You could buy a thousand pounds, or two thousand, and put five hundred pounds of carrots and beets in the cellar. We would put two or three barrels of sauerkraut away for the winter. Anyway, he would take orders from people and bring them to the farmers. He had customers with standing orders. He had big wagons and he would deliver the potatoes to his customers in the fall. He would get a commission and then when the potato season was over, and it was Hol Hamoed, it was time to make matches.⁶³ He had a whole stable of boys and girls to whom he would send cards at Hol Hamoed. Twice a year, at Pesach and Succoth, he would set up meetings for them. They would come to Siedlce from all the surrounding villages. He would go to the station and pick up ten or twenty people, and they would sit and drink tea and eat cookies and show what they could do. My mother used to help him. He couldn't write, so she would write the addresses on the cards. At the meetings, the boys and the girls would want to see if they knew how to write so they would exchange addresses. The girl was supposed to write down the boy's

⁶² "Kartoffel means "potato" in Yiddish, German, and Russian.

⁶³ Hol Hamoed refers to the intermediate days of an eight day holiday like Pesach or Succoth.

address and that way he could see in a very discreet way if she knew how to write. There were dowries too. He used to get paid a percentage of the dowry for making a match. He made a lot of matches. How do you think a girl who lived in some little village, where there were three Jewish families, could find a boy to marry? When I got married, he said to my father, "Do you know how much money I would have gotten if I had matched up your daughter? That's what I lost." He wanted my father to make up the loss. He always joked about it.

There were also fancy matchmakers. If you were rich and had a daughter and you wanted a rich son-in-law, but you couldn't find one in your town, you would tell these matchmakers, and they would know, somewhere else, someone with a lot of money. There was a lot of pressure to marry once you finished school. If you got to be twenty-four or twenty-five and you weren't married, it was a bad situation.

I was twenty-five when we got married. We were going to get married earlier but David got drafted into the Polish army and was stuck on the Russian side. He couldn't come home until March 1940, and then his mother died in July. His mother wanted us to get married before she died. She had cancer and she knew she was dying but his father was opposed. He found a Jewish rule that a wedding should not be marred by sadness or death. You should not remember that it was connected with death. His wife really wanted to see her favorite son married, but he was strongly opposed so we got married after her death.

I met David in the last year of high school, when Sarah transferred to my school. Once I went to visit her and David was home on furlough from the army and she

introduced me to him. We talked a while, but then he went back to the army and when he came back I didn't see much of him. At that time he was going with another girl. I was going with a boy who lived in a little town near Treblinka who came to Siedlce once a week. Later, David started coming to the Kadima Club and somehow we started talking more and spending more time together. People didn't date the way they do here. You were always with a group, but within the group there were couples who talked more, stayed together more. On Saturdays and Sundays, we used to walk in pairs down the main street. I got friendly with Sarah and I used to go to their house and the relationship developed slowly. The other boy - his name was Isaiah Lieberman - wanted to get married when I was seventeen but my mother didn't approve. His parents were good friends of my parents. He came to Siedlce to go to school, and he lived with an aunt in the same building we lived in. He spent most of his time in our apartment and he helped me with homework; he would kick me under the table, but he would help me. He was about four or five years older than I.

When he graduated high school, he went back to his town into his parents' lumber business. They exported lumber to Germany. Lumber was a big business in Poland and they were pretty wealthy. In the winter they would go to the woods to mark the trees to be chopped. They would cut the trees and pull the logs out and in the summer they would cut them into lumber and load the trains. I didn't see him for a few years.

Then, one day when I was about sixteen, he came to visit his aunt and he came to see me. He said, "Let's go to a movie for old times' sake." So we went and we had a good time because we had known each other since we were kids. He started coming regularly and writing me letters. He would send me little gifts from the places he went.

At that time they came out with enamel compacts with mirrors. He sent me about three of those. Then I started smoking cigarettes in secret. I don't know how he found out, but he would send me good expensive cigarettes. We used to buy the cheapest because we never had any money. For a dime you got five cigarettes. He was well off, and he was fun to be with. When he came over, he would turn the house upside down. He was very tall, well over six feet, and he would grab my mother and hold her on his arm and carry her around and sing and dance. He was a lot of fun.

There were two Jewish families in the little town where his family lived who were both in the lumber business; his family got rich and the other family got poor. The daughter of the poor family was very much after him and got pregnant, so he married her. At that time you didn't have children out of wedlock. He had a younger sister who married a son of the other family. The sister and her husband survived the war and they live in Brooklyn. Isaiah and his wife died. I think they had two children, but I never saw them. I never saw him again. At that time I was a little bit involved with David. We were going around a lot. We didn't discuss marriage because he was always involved with his family. He was the head of the family - everybody came to him. It was always said that he was not going to get married until everybody in the family was settled.

David had a younger brother Israel who fell off a table or out of a bed when he was a child and was very badly crippled. In 1938, a friend of the Yomtovs who had finished medical school and was a resident with a surgeon who had emigrated from Vienna to Warsaw told the Yomtovs that this surgeon could straighten Israel out. They took Israel to Warsaw and the doctor operated. Israel came home in a cast from the neck to the knees. It was very, very hard, all summer long in the heat, with no air

conditioning, but he was willing to go through it. He was in the cast six months. When they got him out of the cast he stood straight and a few inches taller. The doctor told him not to have shoes made - we used to wear custom-made shoes - but to buy ready-made shoes. The only problem was that he couldn't sit easily because the joint was stiff. He had never before thought about marriage, but after the operation, he got a girlfriend, and he started thinking about getting married. David tried to set him up. He bought a piece of property with rental apartments that Israel could manage. David felt that once Israel was set up so he could make a living, David could get married himself.

David's oldest brother was Jacob. He was married and had four children. He was a big heavy guy who liked the good life -good drink, good food, good times. He worked in the family business, so he would go to Danzig where the auctions were held for the shiploads of herring which came in from Sweden. In Danzig there was a gambling casino which he liked to frequent so the family didn't trust him with a lot of money. He would come back with expensive wines and caviars and crystal and furs. His house was full of expensive stuff. In the afternoon he liked to go to bed and work crossword puzzles in the paper. He was involved in a lot of the Jewish organizations, but he was not much of a worker.

The second oldest brother was Moshe. Moshe was in love with a girl and wanted to marry her, but his mother didn't think that her family was suitable and broke them up. He never married and never went out with another girl. For him it was the end. He worked in the business and played dominos at the Jewish club. He was also very much involved in the Zionist movement. He went to congresses and devoted his life to

Zionism. He was a good friend of Ben Gurion and Moshe Sharett.⁶⁴ He was very intelligent, very well read, well-mannered. When I started getting very close with David and it looked like we were getting to be a couple, he started talking to me. He would walk with me and everybody would joke that I was the first girl he talked to since the one he wanted to marry. I had a good relationship with him. He was a bit isolated, though he lived in the house. He was the one who always went to the sugar bank in Warsaw. Sugar was a government monopoly in Poland and the sugar bank in Warsaw was where you had to deal with all the sugar shipments. He didn't speak Polish very well - he had a Jewish accent - but he was very nice looking - slender, tall, blond. He didn't look Jewish.

After Moshe came Salka. She was two years older than David. Salka was a rebel. She was the first Yomtov child to go to a Polish school. The older children didn't go to school at all - they just had Hebrew teachers. She didn't go on Saturday but she finished. She married Hershel Slusznny. They were both teaching in public school and they fell in love. At that time you didn't need advanced education to become a teacher. When you finished high school you could teach in the public school. He was from a very

⁶⁴ David Ben Gurion (1886-1973) was a founding father of modern Israel. He became secretary-general of the Histadrut, the Zionist labor organization, in 1921 and chairman of the Jewish Agency executive in 1935. He opposed the 1939 White Paper but advocated cooperation with Britain during the war. When the British refused to cancel the White Paper's restrictions on immigration after the war, he encouraged resistance and illegal immigration. He helped prepare the army and directed Israel's defense in the 1947 War of Independence. On May 14, 1948, the day the British mandate ended, he proclaimed the birth of the state. He then became Israel's first prime minister and defense minister, resigning in 1953 but returning to these posts from 1955 to 1963. He then retired to Sde Boker, a kibbutz in the Negev. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "David Ben Gurion."

Moshe (Shertok) Sharett (1894-1965) also played an important role in the creation of the state of Israel. From 1933 he headed the Jewish Agency's political department, conducting the foreign policy of the Jewish community in Palestine, providing information to various visiting commissions and maintaining contact with the British mandate officials. He helped establish the Jewish Brigade which fought with the Allies in the war and in 1947 his efforts contributed significantly to passage of the United Nations partition plan. He became Israel's first foreign minister and then served as prime minister from 1953 to 1955. Foreign policy differences with Ben Gurion led him to resign both posts. In 1960 he was elected Chairman of the World Zionist Organization executive and the Jewish Agency. He is remembered especially for

reformed aristocratic family but he was also a Zionist and a leader of the Hashomer. They were not religious Jews but they were nationalistic. After they got married, they taught a while longer, but he decided that he did not want to stay in Poland anymore and he decided to go to Paris. There was a whole colony of people from Siedlce in Paris - maybe fifty families - so there was a lot of contact. Hershel and Salka had a child right away, so Salka stayed in Siedlce with the baby while he went to Paris. He couldn't teach there but he got a job in an upholstery shop and his boss liked him very much and taught him upholstering. At that time sofa-sleepers had just been invented and were very popular. This man specialized in them and Hershel stayed with him awhile. Slowly they got into interior decorating. Finally, Hershel left and opened his own business, where he would take assignments on commission. He would take on a house to decorate, and he would get the materials and the furniture. He did pretty well. Salka stayed in Siedlce a year or two and then she went to Paris. Every summer she would come back to Siedlce with their son Michel and rent a house in the country and stay there awhile. The rest of the year Michel would stay with a foster family because she worked too. In Paris a lot of women worked at home. Factories would make knits for dresses and sweaters and cut them, and women would take the cut pieces home and sew the sweaters together. Some women worked in factories, but many sewed at home. Salka did this for a long time, because in the beginning Hershel didn't make much of a living.

When David finished high school, he went into the army, and then to a business school for two years. From the time he was a boy he worked in the family business. When he went into the army, it was very much against the parents' will, because Jews did

not like their sons going into the army. A lot of cities had kosher kitchens for the Jewish soldiers so they wouldn't have to eat regular food. David never went into the kosher kitchen. It was an act of defiance on his part, and his parents were not too happy about it. When he came back from the army he looked at the business and realized that it was not going as it should because Jacob was gambling away a lot of money, and his father was studying the Kabbalah.⁶⁵ His father started the business and he was a good businessman, but he also liked to sit and study the Torah. When David came and took over the business he put Jacob on a salary. That created a lot of tension between him and Jacob's wife Marsha - not between Jacob and David but between Jacob's wife and David. She felt that he took away the family's fortune and he didn't give her enough money. When we married she came to our wedding and she told me, "You are marrying a bandit, a cold-blooded bandit." She was very upset. When Pesach came, people would buy new clothes and shoes. She would send her children over to her mother-in-law, to David's mother, and tell her that they needed new coats and shoes and they couldn't buy them because they had barely enough money to live on. David's mother would tell David, "Marsha needs a coat, etc." and David would give them more money. Jacob was also mad because they cut off his visits to Danzig.

When David took over the business, he said that he wanted to go to Danzig and see how the fish auctions functioned. So he and his father went to Danzig with Jacob. Jacob wasn't really very bright, and he thought if he showed them a good time he might

⁶⁵ Kabbalah is the name used for the esoteric and mystical teachings of Judaism. Jewish mysticism seeks an understanding of God and creation that transcends the intellect. It contends that this understanding is expressed indirectly through symbol and metaphor rather than directly. Numerous restrictions surround the study of Kabbalah because of its esotericism. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Kabbalah."

get back the job of going to Danzig. He was known all over the place. He took them to a nice hotel and then to a restaurant where he got the best table because he knew all the waiters and was a big tipper. They sat at this big table and after dinner, at about ten, all of the tables were suddenly pushed aside, and some naked girls came out to dance. You can imagine how it looked to the old father. There he was in his long black caftan, with his beard and round hat. It didn't help Jacob's prospects. Another day they went to a fancy restaurant to eat. The waiters served them dinner and David's father noticed that Jacob got a big piece of meat while he got a smaller portion. He called the waiter and asked why he got a small piece. This waiter couldn't imagine that the little old Jew had a son as big as Jacob. So he said to him in Yiddish, "I gave the goy the bones, you have the meat."

David's father was very religious. He studied Kabbalah a lot. He wrote Hebrew poetry. He was very, very educated. That's why the mother's family picked him. The Riddels had a lot of money and they wanted a son-in-law who was a student. They didn't know that he didn't want to study all his life. He didn't stay at the studies long before he started the business, which her father wasn't too happy about, because he was their pride and joy and was supposed to become a rabbi. Instead he became a merchant. But later, when his children were older, by the time I knew him, he was spending a lot of time studying the Kabbalah. He also had a sharp tongue; people were afraid of him because of his biting wit. David's mother was very old-fashioned and iron-fisted. She was a girlfriend of my grandmother, and they had the same views. But his father was very nice and tolerant. He knew that the boys cooked and shaved on Saturday, so he would announce "I'm going out. I'll be gone forty minutes." The children knew that they had

forty minutes to do anything they weren't supposed to do on the Sabbath. The parents were very religious. The children weren't. They had a nice Friday night dinner where the children sat at the table and ate, but by the same token they would go out and eat kielbasa. The children lived in the house, and they didn't want to create problems with their parents.

There were eight children in David's family, four sons and four daughters. The first group included Jacob, Leah, and Chana. Then for seven years no children were born. Supposedly under Jewish law, if a woman didn't have children for seven years her husband could divorce her because she was considered barren. People joked that David's mother got so scared that her husband was going to divorce her that she started having children again. They all had double names and sometimes they would sit and recite the names and it was really funny because with eight kids and two parents all having double names, every name was in use.

So there was a gap of seven years and then came Moshe and Salka and David and Israel and Sarah. There was another child who died in infancy, but those were the eight who survived. Jacob and his family died in the war in Siedlce. So did Moshe and Israel. Chana died in Siberia. Her husband, Melech Feinsilber, and two daughters went to Israel. One daughter married a dentist. The other married a boy my mother helped raise. Sarah and Leah survived the war and went to Israel. Salka and Michel survived the war in France, but Hershel was killed. And David survived and came to the United States.

Leah was married before the war. She had a boyfriend she wanted to marry, but her mother was so traditional, so backwards, that she believed you should not know the person you married. Leah knew this boy, so she could not marry him. Once Leah was

talking with the boy, and her mother grabbed her by her two braids and pulled her away. They married her to Alexander Rubenstein who was a very wealthy man. His family was in the grain business in Sokolov. By the time I knew her she was very happy.

We used to go to the Yomtov house even before I got married. Usually our group met after we ate dinner, at about seven, but on Friday night David and Sarah were never free until eight or nine because their family had a big dinner. Sometimes a bunch of us would go to their house and wait for them in the living room. They had a big sofa, and we would all sit squeezed together on the sofa. They had a machine which would turn out the lights at nine or ten, so sometimes the light would go out, and we would still sit and talk. Once Leah was home and she said to me that she couldn't believe that the same woman who pulled her away because she talked with a boy went to bed in the next room while we all sat on the sofa squeezed together with the light out.

David and I had decided to get married in '39, but we didn't do a written engagement contract like some Jews did. We didn't set a date. We said we were going to get married, but David wanted to wait because he wanted to take care of his brothers first. He wanted to set up the business differently. The father let David take over the business because he didn't feel that Jacob should run it. Experience had shown that it wouldn't work out too well for the rest of the family. But David felt bad about Jacob so he was trying to work something out. He wanted to give Jacob the herring part of the business and separate it from the rest of the business. He even set up a separate warehouse. He was also worried about his younger brother Israel so he bought him an apartment house to manage.

The first historical event I remember was the war of 1920 with Russia.⁶⁶ I vaguely remember the Germans also being in town earlier, at some point during World War I.⁶⁷ The war between Poland and Russia began right after the Russian Revolution and Russia wasn't really organized. Poland had a pretty good army after the war. The Polish troops were well organized because they had fought in World War I under Pilsudski.⁶⁸ The Poles also got a lot of help from the French; in fact, the French general Weygand helped the troops. So the Polish legions with French help really chased them. They occupied Russia as far as Kiev.⁶⁹ I remember the Russians running. Afterwards a peace treaty was signed in Brest, a city about eighty miles east of Poland on the river Bug. It used to be a fortress. The treaty established the eastern Polish border at that time. Poland got Lvov and the Ukraine, which is a very good area.⁷⁰ The Ukraine was very good, very rich agricultural land. They grew a lot of wheat and sugar beets there.

⁶⁶ See footnote 21 above.

⁶⁷ In the summer of 1915 the German army occupied much of Poland, presumably including Siedlce. Davies, Heart, 96. The Germans controlled Warsaw and a German military government ruled there from August 1915 until November 1918. Idem, 98. It seems probable that Ida did not actually remember this but heard about it as she would have been four in December 1918.

⁶⁸ Poles fought on both sides in World War I. Pilsudski's Legions fought with the Austrians, the Pulawy Legion fought with the Russians and General Haller's Polish Army fought with the French. Ibid., 97. Approximately two million Poles served in the armies of Russia, Germany and Austria. Idem, 98.

⁶⁹ In 1919 the Poles overran most of Lithuania and Byelorussia. They even marched on Kiev. However, in 1920, the Russians were no longer distracted by civil war, so they drove the Poles out of the Ukraine and came close to taking Warsaw. A wily manoeuvre by Pilsudski managed to beat back their advance. Ibid., 101, 103. The French were sympathetic to the Poles but unable to send serious help. General Weygand came to Warsaw as part of a French-British political mission but contributed little to the outcome. Mieczyslaw B. Biskupski, The History of Poland (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 2000), 70.

⁷⁰ The treaty was signed in Riga, Latvia, on March 18, 1921. Davies, God's Playground, 2:399. Poland took part of Byelorussia, part of Lithuania, and part of Ukraine, but not Kiev. Idem, 2:505. Lvov was awarded to Poland by the League of Nations in 1923. Davies, Heart, 102.

Poland was supposed to be a republic. We elected a president and a parliament in free elections. But Pilsudski, who was the main leader, didn't like the president.⁷¹ His name was Stanislaw Wojciechowski and he was a pretty crude man. In 1924 or 1925 Pilsudski executed a coup d'etat with the army.⁷² It wasn't like coups today where they kill people by the thousands. He just put some soldiers on the streets and threw the president out of the presidential palace. People wanted Pilsudski to be president, but he did not want to be, so they elected Professor Ignacy Moscicki. He used to be a professor of physics at a Swiss university but he had come back to Poland.⁷³ He was a very well-educated man and an internationally known scientist. He spoke several languages. It was said that he helped devise one of the first air-conditioning systems. He was like Paderewski - Paderewski was a musician, not a politician, but he was made premier because he had international stature.⁷⁴ Moscicki was named president for the same reason. He was a figurehead, he had very little power, but he represented Poland very

⁷¹ Pilsudski was declared Chief of State of the New Second Republic on November 14, 1918. Davies, Heart, 100. He withdrew from office in 1922 because he was upset by parliamentary infighting. He returned to power in the May coup of 1926, ousting President Wojciechowski, a former colleague from Pilsudski's socialist years. Idem, 108, 120. Pilsudski's motives for returning to power have not been definitively determined. Idem, 108.

⁷² It was 1926. Most of the army and much of the citizenry was loyal to the government and President Wojciechowski, but the left supported Pilsudski. The socialist railroad workers union went on strike, making it impossible for the government to bring reinforcements to the capital, so Pilsudski, whose forces were in Warsaw, prevailed. The coup took three days, May 12-14. Ibid, 108-109.

⁷³ Ignacy Moscicki (1867-1946) was a noted scientist who published many articles and held forty patents. From 1897 to 1912 he was a professor of electrochemistry at Fribourg, Switzerland; he then taught electrochemistry at the Polytechnical School in Lvov. In May 1926 he was asked by his friend Pilsudski to take over the presidency of Poland. He remained in office until September 1939, when he left for Switzerland. He founded factories to manufacture fertilizers from nitric acid but I found no reference to air-conditioning systems. George J. Lerski, Historical Dictionary of Poland, 966-1945 (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 367.

⁷⁴ Ignacy Paderewski was a famous Polish pianist and composer who dedicated himself to creating an independent Poland and served briefly as the first prime minister of the Polish republic. Davies, Heart, 105.

well. Pilsudski really ran the show. I don't know if you could call Pilsudski an anti-Semite, but he wasn't particularly for the Jews.⁷⁵ He tried to keep up a liberal appearance because Poland needed a lot of foreign aid and couldn't get it if he hadn't done this. I remember at that time, 1920, I went to a kindergarten and we used to get a lot of American food, cocoa and big white rolls. We were told that the Americans sent this food because Poland didn't have any at that time. The country was terribly run down. It never had any industry and all the fields were turned into battlefields so nothing was planted.⁷⁶ A lot of help came in, and I think he kept his liberal facade to get this help.

Elections were free. There must have been twenty-five parties. We had parties ranging from very, very liberal to very, very, reactionary.⁷⁷ The N.D., the National Democrats, was an anti-Semitic party. They were really on the far right.⁷⁸ There were religious parties and there were a lot of Jewish parties, seven or eight.⁷⁹ There were Jewish senators who were very active and outspoken. There was a lawyer, Hartglas, from

⁷⁵ Pilsudski was generally favorably regarded by the Jews because he urged reconciliation between Poles and Jews and organizations associated with him welcomed Jews as members. *Ibid.*, 125. Unlike his rival, Roman Dmowski, Pilsudski believed the Polish nation could include different ethnic and cultural groups, as long as they were all loyal to Poland. *Idem*, 120.

⁷⁶ Much of the fighting on the eastern front in World War I took place on Polish soil, devastating farmlands, roads, towns and villages. One writer estimates that "the damage equalled about one-eighth of the total national wealth." Marcus, *Social*, 13.

⁷⁷ See footnote 4 above.

⁷⁸ The National Democrats, the N.D. or *Endecja*, was the party of Roman Dmowski, who saw the nation as a "biological kinship group" and believed that ethnic diversity diluted a nation's strength. Davies, *Heart*, 120-121. A "professional anti-Semite," Dmowski considered the Jews an alien subversive element. He repeatedly called for boycotts of Jewish enterprises and quotas on Jewish students. *Idem*, 125. As early as 1903, the party's platform sought the removal of Jews from important economic positions and the reduction of their social and cultural influence. Gutman, *Polish Antisemitism*, 98-99.

⁷⁹ Davies says, "Polish Jewry could boast almost as many parties as voters." He identifies four main groups-Poale Zion (Workers of Zion), both nationalist and socialist; Bund, internationalist and somewhat Marxist, with pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet factions; Zionists; and Agudat Israel, a conservative religious party. These "four main tendencies mirrored...their Polish counterparts." Davies, *Heart*, 115.

Warsaw, who was a very famous senator. There was a Gruenbaum.⁸⁰ They had freedom of speech and they said what they wanted. Maybe they didn't accomplish much, but they voiced their views.

The senate had only one chamber and the senators did not represent particular districts.⁸¹ Every party submitted a list of candidates, and all over the country people voted for the party. To be elected, a candidate needed a certain number of votes, say twenty thousand or so. If a party got 100,000 votes the first five people from its list got elected. The lists were usually long because if the party wanted to honor someone, it would put his name on the list. This person would never be elected because he might be number forty or fifty on the list and this particular party could only elect ten people. Usually the people that the party really wanted elected were at the top of the list. I think there were 144 senators, and they served four year terms.

Pilsudski's party had a majority. I forgot what he called it, but it was sort of a middle of the road party.⁸² The remaining parties would form blocs. The people who

⁸⁰ Maximilian Meir Apolinary Hartglas (1883-1953) practiced law in Siedlce from 1907-1919. In 1920 he was elected to the Sejm, where he worked for the repeal of anti-Semitic laws in Poland's former Russian provinces. He was chairman of the Polish Zionist Organization, fought discriminatory policies and defended unjustly accused Jews in several famous trials. In 1940 he emigrated to Palestine and worked for the Jewish Agency. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Maximilian M.A. Hartglas." See footnote 16 above for information on Yizchak Gruenbaum.

⁸¹ The Senate was one of the two chambers of the parliament, the other being the Sejm. The Senate had 111 members, the Sejm 444. Every Polish citizen aged twenty-one or more was entitled to vote. The parliament elected the President, who, together with the appointed ministers, constituted the government and was responsible to the parliament. Marcus, Social, 18.

⁸² Pilsudski was not an ideologue and his party had no particular ideology. The name he gave the party, Sanacja, meaning moral regeneration and efficient administration, reflected his concern that the Sejm was not functioning effectively and not providing Poland the financial and political stability it needed. However, Pilsudski never dissolved the Sejm nor the political parties, thought he did arrest some opponents. He ruled behind the scenes with the help of many military associates whom he elevated to high positions. Biskupski, History, 78-79; Davies, Heart, 109-110. After his death in 1935 the Sanacja adopted a more nationalistic anti-Semitic stance and moved closer to the policies of its rival, the right-wing

were elected would travel all over the country. We didn't have campaigning like here. You knew the candidates from the paper or the radio. In a bigger city they sometimes would come to make a speech, but they didn't go around to barbecues shaking hands.

At election time there was a drawing and every party was assigned a number. I don't know how they fixed it but Pilsudski's party was always number one. Every party gave you a little piece of paper with a big number printed on it. When you went to vote, you stated your name, and the poll commissioners entered it in a book. There was a box with a slit on the table, and you put the number of the party you wanted into an envelope and then into the box.

The country was divided into *voyehutzva* which were like states. I think there were seven, and each one was headed by a *voyevode*, who was like a governor. Each *voyehutzva* was divided into *poviats*, which are like counties here, and a *storoster* ran each poviat. The cities had councils and mayors. The Jews sent representatives to the city councils and also had their own Jewish community councils.

In Poland a rabbi didn't have a degree or graduate from a seminary. He was just a man who knew the Torah. In the last few years before the war the government passed a law requiring rabbis to know how to read and speak Polish.⁸³ They all had to take classes because none of them knew it. Marriage required a civil ceremony at city hall. Jews always had a religious ceremony also, but a marriage without the religious ceremony was legally valid. A religious ceremony without a civil one was no good. Very few people got divorced. It seems unbelievable but a divorce was a terrible black mark on a family. Also,

Endecja.

⁸³ I could not find any reference to this law.

if a woman got divorced what would she do? She would starve unless the family supported her. She couldn't get a job and there was no such thing as alimony or child support. I had one girlfriend whose father divorced her mother, and she and her mother made their living by knitting sweaters for people. They had a hard time, so we would go there and help her knit sweaters.

Sometimes a man would leave for the United States, and his wife didn't hear from him for years. Sometimes she didn't hear because he couldn't send anything, but sometimes the man just disappeared and was never heard from again. That didn't happen with people who were better off financially, but it did with poor people.

There were many regulations. If you had a house that you rented out you had to enter the name of all your tenants in a special book. When you moved into a house or apartment, you had to fill out a card saying where you came from, and the landlord had to take it to the police, who registered it and stamped it. When you moved away you had to go and fill out another card and they stamped you out. The police always knew where everyone was. While you were still in school you had an identification card with a picture. When you turned eighteen, you went to the city hall and they gave you a regular passport. You had to carry it. It had your picture and address so when you moved you had to bring in this passport and get the address changed. The landlord was responsible. If a tenant moved out and he didn't report it within a day or two or three he was fined. If you sold the rental property the book went with the house to the new owner so the police could always check the book and see who lived there.

The tax system was very harsh. It was mostly directed against the Jews.⁸⁴ The bookkeeping was different. Here we do bookkeeping with a pencil. There was no such thing in Poland. You had a set of ledgers and they had a hole punched through them. When the fiscal year began, January 1st, you went to the office of the Treasury and they would put a string through the ledger's hole and seal it with wax seals on both ends. All the ledgers were sealed so you could never remove a page from the book. If you made a mistake in bookkeeping you had to correct it with red ink and put your signature on it and an explanation of why this figure was changed. Also you did not file a tax return. They sent you a bill. They would come to your store and look to see what your inventory was. They wouldn't take a detailed inventory. They would just look around and say, "Your inventory is worth so much, you make so much money," and they would send you a tax bill. It was not very accurate. You might have a little store that sold hay, for example. You could have three stories piled high with hay, which was worth nothing, but they would say, "You're loaded."

⁸⁴ There appears to be some disagreement as to whether the taxation system intentionally discriminated against Jews. Gutman contends that taxation and credit policies showed "anti-Jewish tendencies or outcomes." Gutman, Polish Antisemitism, 103. Heller says that the taxation system burdened mainly small and medium-sized private businesses, which were largely Jewish-owned; she adds that tax officials appraised Jewish property capriciously and zealously enforced confiscatory measures when Jews could not pay. Heller, Edge, 104. Marcus takes a more nuanced stance. He acknowledges that Jews paid a disproportionate share of taxes; in 1929 they paid 21.5% of all taxes in Poland while constituting approximately 10% of the population and receiving about 13% of the income. Marcus, Social, 222. However, he attributes this to the type of economic activities in which Jews were engaged, rather than to intentionally anti-Semitic policies. The principal taxes were an income tax and a "turnover" tax, which seems to be a sort of VAT or sales tax. Farmers escaped these taxes, mainly because there were many tax privileges and exemptions granted to landholders. Marcus contends that these privileges "were not granted to ruin the Jews...but to bolster up the landowners...." Idem, 220. The impact of these privileges, however, is shown in the fact that in 1929 the farm and non-farm sectors each provided 45% of the national income, but agriculture paid only 12% of all taxes. Few Jews were farmers, so they ended up paying a disproportionate share of taxes. The Jews saw this as intentional discrimination. Idem, 219-220. The tax system was a major source of Jewish-Polish friction.

The system allowed a lot of discrimination because very few Jews were state or civil servants. If you had a salary you reported you made so much money because that was the salary. But most Jews were storekeepers. When the tax collectors came in they looked through the store. They thought that if you took in a dollar it went in your pocket. Sometimes they would also come and check your books. The Yomtovs had an import business. They didn't report their sales. Every year a man would come and check all their books and send them a bill. If you didn't pay, they did not play around. They would come and seal up the store and take everything away. They would leave you very little, just the clothes you had on your back or maybe a bed to sleep in.⁸⁵

There were a lot of Jewish papers, some in Yiddish, some in Polish. Different papers presented the viewpoints of different parties. Anything Communist was confiscated. Communists used to throw red flags on the telephone wires. That was their way of demonstrating. They would take a red piece of material and tie a string with a stone to it. When they threw the stone the string would run around the wire and the flag would hang down. They did this all the time and they would get arrested and get stiff sentences for it. When the police saw the flags they knew who to arrest. There were not many Communists. They were mostly young people, mostly Jewish. They had an underground Communist party and a newspaper which was constantly confiscated.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Jewish diaries apparently mention tax officials unexpectedly entering Jewish homes and confiscating household goods. Heller, Edge, 104.

⁸⁶ See footnote 17 above.

The Communist Party was not illegal, since it participated in elections, but it must have been doing something illegal because three-quarters of its members were in jail in the 1930's. At its peak in 1934, the party had 10,300 members; its Jewish membership ranged from 35% in 1930 to 24% in 1932. Marcus, Social, 290.

Tec says the party was outlawed in 1938, at which time it had 20,000 members. Tec, When Light, 123. Davies says party membership was 3927 when last recorded in 1937. Davies, Heart, 79.

Labor unions were usually small local unions. Usually one man ran the union, like my father's foreman ran the shoemakers' union. There was probably corruption but not on the scale we have here. They didn't have pension plans from which they could steal millions of dollars. It amounted to small things - maybe a cake or a free chicken. Some of the unions had a little club where they would get together; some didn't even have this. A lot of people did not belong to unions. People who worked in factories belonged, but those who had their own shops didn't. In Lodz and Bialystok, which had large textile factories, they had large unions of textile workers that were quite powerful. There were strikes and all kinds of things, but in Siedlce there wasn't too much activity.

I also remember that in the thirties the government enacted a law that you could not travel abroad unless you showed a certain amount of income. If you wanted to go someplace you had to show that you paid so much taxes on so much income and that you could afford a trip. When Sarah wanted to visit Salka in Paris, she got a passport with no problem because they had this income, but other people could not get one because they didn't have the money. You couldn't come and say, "My aunt gave me a gift." The aunt had to show the income. It involved a lot of red tape.

In the 1920's Poland had terrible inflation. At that time there were Polish marks left over from World War I, from the German occupation. In 1914 Poland was part of Russia, but during the war the Germans pushed the Russians back and occupied the country. In 1916 the Germans came to Siedlce. They opened hospitals, they vaccinated people, and they cleaned up things that were dirty. They got friendly with people, they

Ida's statement that the Communists were mostly Jewish demonstrates the success anti-Semites had in propagating the myth of the Jewish Communist, the "enemy within" who conspired with Russia against Poland. Actually most Jews were anti-Communist or non-Communist, but some of the Jews who were in the Communist party held highly visible positions. The anti-Semites conveniently overlooked the

bought things from people, and people liked them. They needed tailors, so people had work. Some people did not run away in 1939 because they thought they were dealing with the same kind of Germans.⁸⁷ Before the German occupation, the money was the ruble, but the Germans brought in their mark. After the 1918 Treaty of Versailles when Poland became independent, Poland made a Polish mark from the German one. In the mid-1920's inflation became terrible.⁸⁸ It got to a point where people were let out of work every hour so they could shop. People would buy everything because from hour to hour the prices rose. It got so bad the government could not print any more money because the amounts were getting bigger and bigger. So they would cut the money in pieces and stamp it. They would cut a mark bill in four and stamp each piece worth a thousand marks. Everything was in the millions and billions. People practically stopped buying anything. Finally they had a money reform.⁸⁹ They established the zloty as the currency and one hundred eighty thousand marks equaled one zloty.

The zloty had a gold base. At that time the government got money from the United States and sold American bonds. They were American bonds but they were based on some Polish currency. You paid about a hundred dollars for a bond and got interest and coupons and you were supposed to cash them in after so many years for a certain

fact that Jews joined the party because it opposed anti-Semitism. Heller, Edge, 254-255.

⁸⁷ In the months before December 1939, when the border between German-occupied Poland and Soviet-occupied Poland was closed, many Polish Jews chose to stay in German-occupied Poland because they remembered the Germans sympathetically from their World War I encounters and distrusted the Russians. Some Polish Jews actually fled Russian-occupied Poland for the German sector because they feared the Russians more than the Germans. Hilberg, Destruction, 123; Gilbert, Second World War, 23.

⁸⁸ In 1918 one American dollar was worth nine Polish marks; in 1923 an American dollar equalled fifteen million Polish marks. Davies, Heart, 107.

⁸⁹ The new zloty currency was introduced in 1924. That and additional reforms initiated by Wladyslaw Grabski brought brief stability. *Ibid.*, 107. Another stabilization effort in 1926-27 was more

amount. David had thousands of dollars of those bonds in a safe deposit box in the national bank in Poland. After the war he wrote letters and tried to recover them but they told him the bank was evacuated and everything had disappeared. He even had the numbers of the bonds but they couldn't find them. He wrote several letters. He wrote to Washington, he wrote to the national bank in Poland, but nothing came of it. I think I still have copies of the letters someplace because he tried. It would have been a fortune if he could get it. But they said there was no trace. They just disappeared.

So the government devalued the mark and came up with the zloty, which was fairly stable. Food was cheap, but anything manufactured was expensive, because Poland didn't have it. Then Germany started taking away a lot of food and sending in a lot of industrial products. Some of them were useless because Polish farmers used horses to plow and didn't know much about machinery. But Germany had a place to push the products out and get food for them. Poland was a very rich country; it had a lot of coal, a lot of iron, and a lot of food. Food was never a problem, but there were always economic problems because it didn't have any industry at all. It had the raw materials, the coal, the iron, but they had to be exported. Germany had the factories to make the iron into steel. Also, we didn't have a door out into the world. Gdansk was an open city that we could use, but it wasn't really a Polish port, so Poland starting building a port at Gdynia, a few miles away from Gdansk.⁹⁰ It was built with foreign help. It was almost ready when the

successful, perhaps because it was supported by a large loan from the United States. Marcus, Social, 25.

⁹⁰ Gdynia was a small town and port on the Gulf of Gdansk until 1922, when the Sejm decided to enlarge it so that Poland could be economically independent of nearby Gdansk, which was German-dominated. By 1939, Gdynia had become a city of 120,000 people and the largest Baltic port. In World War II the Nazis deported the entire Polish population and used the harbor as a repair shipyard. Lerski, Historical, 157.

Gdansk (Danzig) is a port city at the mouth of the Vistula River. It was part of Poland until 1308,

war broke out and the corridor went.⁹¹ We also had a casino in Sopot, outside Gdansk, a Polish casino which was like Monte Carlo. Poland had a lot of nobility who liked to live extravagantly. They had hundreds of miles of estates, lots of money, and they dressed up in silks and went to casinos and gambled. A lot of those high nobles borrowed money from the Jews. They were in hock for everything.

Given time, Poland would probably have developed, because it was a rich country. Poland had so much sugar we exported it. This was beet sugar, not cane. Sugar was cheap, but it wasn't on the free market. The sale of sugar was controlled by the government because the government needed western money and wanted to make sure sugar was available for export. A special bank handled the sugar deals and in every state there were certain distributors who were allowed to sell sugar. The Yomtovs had the distribution rights for our district. Very few Jews had these rights, only about two in the whole country. Everybody who wanted to buy sugar had to come to them and they dealt with this government bank for sugar.

The money reform in the 1920's stabilized the economy a little. In 1929 the Depression hit America, and it affected Poland too because the economy was heavily dependent on American aid. American economists advised the government on how to run the country. There was a little depression in Poland but not as bad as here because Poland

when it was conquered by the Teutonic Knights. In 1466 Poland regained it. It remained Polish until 1772 when the Prussians took it in the first partition of Poland. After World War I, the Versailles Treaty declared it a Free City, under the supervision of the League of Nations. Hitler claimed Gdansk and the corridor belonged to Germany and used them as pretexts for his invasion of Poland. *Idem*, 156.

⁹¹ The corridor was the name given to the strip of land awarded to Poland by the Versailles Treaty to give Poland free access to the Baltic Sea. The territory, called Eastern Pomerania by the Poles and West Prussia by the Germans, was part of Poland from 1466 until 1772, when it was taken by Prussia in the first partition of Poland. *Ibid.*, 86. The corridor separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany and had a large German minority, so Hitler claimed it belonged to Germany. Davies, *Heart*, 101-102.

wasn't that industrialized.⁹² Then the situation improved. Business in the thirties was normal, people made a living. Everything functioned well. There were no large bankruptcies or bank failures. It wasn't a volatile situation as it was in Germany, because Germany was much more industrialized. If a factory closed it affected a lot of people, it put a lot of people out in the street. In Poland most of the farmers had their land; maybe they got a little less for the crop, but they were a stable population. Poland's population wasn't so nomadic; it didn't travel from one end of the country to the other. The only thing that would happen was that if a farmer had one hundred acres of ground and three sons, when he died the sons would divide the farm into three small farms. So the farms got smaller and smaller and it became harder and harder to make a living. A lot of the daughters would come to the city to find jobs as maids, because it got harder and harder to make a living from a smaller amount of land. But other things also started to happen. With the rise of Hitler in the early 1930's anti-Semitism started coming to the surface more and more.

By 1933 Hitler was Chancellor, and all kinds of nasty statements began to be heard. If somebody didn't have a job or didn't make a living it was because of the Jews. People said that the Jews were Communists, or that they were all rich. Slowly the atmosphere got worse. The statements weren't really true, but the accusations were made. There had been pogroms in Siedlce - there was a big one in 1909 - but I did not worry

⁹² Poland was definitely underdeveloped industrially, but it suffered the effects of the Depression nonetheless. In fact, Marcus contends that "the Great Depression ravaged Poland even more than the western countries, because of the agrarian nature of Poland's economy" and the government's deflationary policies. Marcus, *Social*, 25. At its peak "at least 40 percent of the working-age population were idle, industrial production was down by 35 percent,... [and] fiscal revenue was reduced by two-fifths...." Idem, 25. Almost half the peasants were starving by the end of 1931. In towns, the number of unemployed increased from 425,000 in 1929 to one million in 1931. Because of their concentration in commerce, Jews

about pogroms or physical danger at all until after Hitler took over in Germany. Then groups of hooligans started attacking Jews and beating people up. Between 1933 and 1939 there was a lot of anti-Semitic picketing of Jewish stores, where they usually said "for your own, go to your own."⁹³ They picketed Jewish stores, but people still went in and bought. There was an anti-Semitic paper and there were beatings, mostly in the park, mostly of boys and men who wore the traditional garb, the caftans and payot.⁹⁴ I personally never worried about it. People would say, "Don't go into the park at night, don't sit on the bench, they will beat you up." But we did and nothing ever happened, although they did beat up other people. Generally they didn't bother women, even if they might have known you were Jewish.

It became even harder to get a job. Jews began to grow especially uneasy because a lot of Jews of Polish origin returned to Poland from Germany. Hitler threw them out. They started telling their stories, how everything was taken away from them and they were allowed to take out only one hundred marks.

A girlfriend of mine had an uncle who came. He had worked in Berlin and was kicked out and came with just his personal possessions and a little sum of money. So we knew some of what was happening, but just as in 1942 when they liquidated the ghetto, we didn't believe. There is something in a person, a self-preservation instinct, which doesn't let you believe things which are so bad. You form a block against it. We thought

suffered more than other townspeople; by the end of 1931, one-third were destitute, dependent on charity, and one-third were living at a bare subsistence level. *Idem*, 231-232.

⁹³"Swoj do Swego po Swoje" was the slogan of *Gazeta Polska*, a newspaper published by Roman Dmowski, head of the National Democrats, the N.D.'s (*Endecja*), even prior to World War I. The newspaper was dedicated to promoting the economic and social boycott of Jews. Heller, *Edge*, 44.

⁹⁴ Payot are the lengthy curled sidelocks worn by traditional orthodox Jewish males.

that maybe the situation was not so bad, that maybe these people were scared because the Germans threw them out, so they exaggerated. The same thing happened when we heard about Treblinka--nobody believed. You could see signs: the anti-Semitic party got stronger, the papers contained a lot of articles in which the Jewish senators spoke out about things which were happening. The political situation really heated up. People started feeling uneasy. The Jews were uneasy about Hitler's policies. The Poles began to feel uneasy about the possibility of war, because it was obvious that Hitler wanted the corridor and they did not intend to give it up. If there is anything you can say about the Poles it is that they are very patriotic. They have always fought for independence. It's in their blood.

The corridor was a piece of Poland which went straight to the Baltic Sea and separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany. Hitler wanted the corridor so he could connect them. The story of Prussia was an old one. Poland was always called the bulwark of Christianity, because it was always fighting the Tatars. The Poles needed help, so the Polish king allowed mercenaries to settle in this part of Poland and build their castles, but later they didn't want to give the land back. Poland claimed it had a historic right to this land, that it just let the mercenaries settle there so they would have a base to go east and fight.⁹⁵ But Hitler said that this land was German. Losing the corridor would cut Poland

⁹⁵ Prince Konrad I, also known as Conrad of Mazovia, invited the Teutonic Knights, an order of unemployed crusaders, to Poland in 1226 to help him fight pagan Prussian tribes, not the Tatars. Within a hundred years, the Knights established their own state and grew very powerful, controlling the Baltic coast and Gdansk. Davies, *Heart*, 252-253. They suffered a major defeat at Grünwald in 1410, at the hands of a combined Polish-Lithuanian force, and their power went into decline. The order was finally destroyed in a long war fought between 1454 and 1466, but the Teutonic Knights remained potent symbolic enemies of Poland. *Idem*, 258.

off from the sea. Since Poland had to live off exports and imports the corridor was critical to the economy.

In 1938 there was Austria and the deal with Chamberlain.⁹⁶ That didn't make anybody feel better. That same year Hitler gave Poland a little piece of the Sudetenland. The Poles were very divided about it. Most people thought the government was stupid to take it. They figured he's giving it to us now, but he's going to take everything back later. Others celebrated with parades, saying we got back the land. So the situation was very bad. People started thinking about leaving and some people did leave, but it was very hard to leave because most people wanted to go to the United States and the United States had a quota. There was no way you could get in under the quota.⁹⁷ In 1939 my father, without even telling us, tried to get me and Wit out of the country through HIAS.⁹⁸ HIAS took Jewish children out and placed them in the United States. They took children from Austria and put them in kibbutzim in Israel. But I guess it was too late. They couldn't do it. So people tried but there weren't many places to go. Some people went to France, but I don't know if they got caught later or managed to get out. There was nowhere to go. It got worse and worse - scary and very uneasy. People read the papers and listened to the radio. They got together and talked about what was happening.

⁹⁶ Hitler annexed Austria on March 12, 1938. Dawidowicz, *War*, 95. Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, and Edouard Daladier, Prime Minister of France, negotiated the Munich Agreement with Hitler in September 1938. In an effort to appease Hitler and to gain "peace for our time", they awarded Hitler the Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia. *Idem*, 99.

⁹⁷ Under the national origins quota system set up in the 1920's, the United States quota for immigrants from Poland was 6524 a year. Mark Wyman, *DP: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989), 186.

⁹⁸ The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) was established in 1902 in New York by a group of Russian immigrants to help other Eastern European immigrants move through the immigration process, to protect them from abuse and to provide for their emergency needs. H. Sachar, *Course*, 312.

We knew a lot about Germany because people kept coming over the border. We didn't read Hitler's books because we didn't have them, but we knew his ideas because he was next door. We knew about Kristallnacht.⁹⁹ We knew that in Berlin they grabbed Jews and made them lick the sidewalk with their tongues. We knew all this but we didn't think that it would ever happen in Poland. We thought it was exaggerated. We didn't want to believe it because we didn't want to face it. Life went on like this until 1939, when Hitler decided he wanted the corridor more and more. In the meantime, in Poland the government changed. Pilsudski had died in 1935. There was a big funeral and in Cracow everybody brought soil and they built a mountain.¹⁰⁰ I went there along with all the children from all the schools. Afterwards the military took over. There was a foreign minister, Colonel Jozef Beck. Some said he was a Jew. Some said he was a convert. He was a very distinguished man who died in London in exile.¹⁰¹ There was General Slawoj-Skladkowski.¹⁰² They began to talk of fighting if Hitler tried to take the corridor. First the Poles were scared. Then suddenly the mood changed and they got the fighting spirit. The

⁹⁹ Kristallnacht, the "night of broken glass", occurred on November 9, 1938. Synagogues were set afire, Jewish shops looted and destroyed, and Jews beaten and killed throughout Germany. Dawidowicz, War, 100.

¹⁰⁰ Pilsudski was buried in the crypt of Wawel Cathedral in Cracow, next to the kings of Poland. Davies, Heart, 119.

¹⁰¹ Jozef Beck (1894-1944) was one of the military men who made up the "government of the Colonels." Head of the War Minister's office from 1926 to 1930, he then became deputy Foreign Minister and in 1932 Foreign Minister. In that office he continued Pilsudski's policy of even-handedness between Germany and the Soviet Union, signing non-aggression treaties with the Soviet Union in 1932 and Germany in 1934. He also concluded mutual aid agreements with Britain in 1939. After the Russian invasion on September 17, 1939, Beck joined other government officials in fleeing to Rumania; he was imprisoned and died there. Lerski, Historical, 30-31.

¹⁰² General Slawoj-Skladkowski (1885-1962), a friend of Pilsudski, was one of the military men Pilsudski brought to power after his 1926 coup. He served as Interior Minister from 1926 to 1931 and then as a Deputy Minister of Defense and Chief of Army Administration. In 1936 he became Prime Minister and approved a boycott of Jewish enterprises. In September 1939 he fled to Rumania where he was jailed.

government had a lot of generals and the prime minister was a general and they started wearing uniforms with medals and playing martial music on the radio. They signed an anti-aggression pact with France and England committing those countries to come to Poland's aid in case of war.¹⁰³ When August 1939 came, they put up loudspeakers on the street and when you walked all you heard was martial music. The papers started telling people what to do in case of war, but all the advice was based on the last war. Everyone thought the next war would be like the last one. They told you to secure one room in your house because the Germans would throw gas. They threw gas in 1918. The papers said to criss-cross paper on the windowpanes so they wouldn't break. They didn't realize that the whole house was going to go. Later it seemed funny, but at that time people didn't know so they listened. Every apartment had windows covered with criss-cross papers and one room secured so you could go there when the gas came. People started hoarding food. We didn't have refrigeration so people hoarded basics like rice, flour, and lard.

The Yomtovs had an import business and they handled basics like sugar, rice and oil. Since a lot of merchants hoarded these products, the government passed a law authorizing the arrest of any wholesaler reported to be hoarding oil. The arrested person would be held in a special prison, with black marketers. By August the Yomtovs were very worried because they had trainloads of oil. In fact, when the war broke out the Germans seized a ship full of oil which was under way for them. They were afraid that

Ibid., 549.

¹⁰³ The French and the Poles signed military protocols in May 1939. Ibid., 30. Great Britain issued a guarantee of Polish independence on March 31, 1939, and signed a mutual aid agreement a few days later. However, it "did little or nothing to improve Poland's military position." Biskupski, *History*, 92. Britain knew that it could offer Poland no practical help but it hoped these actions would deter Hitler. Hitler considered them meaningless and renounced his non-aggression pact with Poland on April 28. Davies, *God's Playground*, 2:431. The French and British then promised to attack Germany if Germany

somebody would say something and they would be arrested. The father was an old man and he would not have survived arrest, so they asked for police protection. They figured that if the police were in the store, they would see that nothing was being smuggled out. The lines to the store ran all along the street. All the grocers came and they were selling all the oil, sugar, and rice they had.

August was a very hot month, not in terms of the weather but politically. The martial music played all day and people didn't know what to do. In mid-summer the government started mobilizing the army. Since most people did not have telephones, they would send runners -mostly teenage boys -from the city hall to different houses to tell the men there that tomorrow morning they had to go. We watched anxiously as those boys ran from house to house with their sheets of paper. It was eerie. I couldn't go to the Yomtovs too much at that time because of what was happening. By about the 29th of August the pitch was unbelievable. The loudspeakers blared all night long with martial music. They never stopped. There were thousands of people milling in the streets at all hours, and at night the streets were as light as in daytime. The mood was high, very patriotic, but at the same time, it was very anxious. My father was very worried because we didn't have any money. We had a factory full of shoes waiting to be sold, because normally everyone bought shoes in September when school started, but all our cash had been put into the materials.

I remember the last day of August. I was trying to find out if David was mobilized and I couldn't. He was an officer in the Polish army, in the uhlans. The Polish army had uhlans. They were the cavalry. They rode on horses with swords and they wore

beautiful uniforms with capes. It was very nice, very dashing, but it couldn't stop a German tank. I had a cousin who was also in the cavalry — the famous cavalry that charged the German tanks at Kutno. When you look back it seems ridiculous, but that's what we had.¹⁰⁴ I was really worried, and I went to the Yomtovs' store that afternoon to find out if David was mobilized. I sent somebody in to ask him, because he was deep in the store, and he said no, he wasn't. They usually closed the store at seven and he got home about eight. So about nine I walked to his house and at the steps I met his oldest brother's wife. She was coming down and she was crying and I asked what happened. She said, "You mean you don't know. They mobilized David and his mother is hysterical." I went up and he was already dressed because he had his own uniform. I asked him when this happened. He said they told him yesterday. He didn't want to say anything. He didn't want anybody to make a fuss over it, so when they brought the notice he just kept quiet. He didn't tell anybody. He had to leave the next morning to go to Brest to meet his regiment. So we went out in the streets, which were full of people, to a little garden where they had tables, like a cafe. We sat there and talked and talked and I asked, "Why do you have to go at five o'clock? There is a train at ten. Why don't you wait and go then?" He had to be there for a certain time. He didn't want to wait. His mother was upset, and he knew that she was sick. He knew he might never see her again, but he had to go. He didn't want any long good-byes. If he hadn't gone on that five o'clock train he

¹⁰⁴ The cavalry was not the only thing the Poles had, but they were woefully outstripped. The German forces were mechanized and motorized; they had 2600 tanks to the Poles 150, 2000 planes to the Poles 400. Despite these overwhelming disadvantages, the Poles fought bravely, inflicting 50,000 casualties on the Germans and surpassing their original objective, which was to engage the Germans for two weeks until France could mobilize and invade Germany. Davies, *God's Playground*, 2:438. "Colorful stories about sabre-swinging cavalymen charging the steel hulls of Panzer tanks hardly do justice to the record." Davies, *Heart*, 56. Both Davies and Biskupski contend that cavalry units were quite effective in

would not have gone because the Germans bombed early Friday morning, the first of September; they bombed the railroads and his train was the last train that passed.¹⁰⁵ By nine o'clock there was no train. He was so damned stubborn.

We stayed up all night and talked. He said to do what I could for his parents. Then we went to his house and he took his suitcase and I went with him to the train station and he left. It was five o'clock in the morning. I was tired so I went home and went to sleep. About two hours later my father came into my room and woke me up. He said Germany had bombed thirteen cities. They crossed the border from two directions, from east and west. The war was on. There was panic in the streets. Everybody was running around in circles and we didn't know what to do. We listened to the radio. Lots of patriotic talk. Government officials said, yes, the war has started and we are going to fight. There were no trains. I knew that if David hadn't left when he had, he would not have gone. Siedlce was not bombed for another few days. The Germans didn't bomb it until Wednesday. They just marched toward Warsaw, bombing all of western Poland. We were on the east side of Warsaw. But the roads were soon full of refugees from the west. The main street in Siedlce became a highway. Overnight, it was filled with horses and cars and buggies and people loaded down with suitcases. Cars were lying by the side of the road because they had run out of gasoline. We didn't have any stations. People could only drive as far as the gas in their tank carried them. You could get a diamond for a horse or a bike. Within a few hours everything was upset — the whole order. Suddenly you realized that

September 1939. Biskupski adds that the Germans and many other armies at the time used horses. Biskupski, History, 104.

¹⁰⁵ The war began at 4:40 a.m. on September 1, 1939, when a German battleship docked at Gdansk opened fire on a Polish fort at Westerplatte. The bombardment of Warsaw, Lodz, Czestochowa, Cracow and Poznan as well as roads, railroad tracks and bridges immediately followed. Davies, God's Playground,

the pieces of paper on the window and the secured room were not going to do. By Tuesday the government moved to Brest because Warsaw was bombed. All the big shots from Warsaw and all the generals went by in big limousines, with trucks full of files and people wounded, people bandaged, children. It was unbelievable. We just stood and watched.

About five o'clock Wednesday morning we suddenly heard the loud noise of bombs. People ran into the streets. You ran, you didn't know where to run and many people were killed. Most people were killed the first day because they didn't know where to go or what to do. If you survived it was just a fluke. We locked the door to our house and went to the prison because we thought that the prison buildings were safe. They had large cellars. All the people who worked in the prison were there with their families. The warden said that he had an order to free all the prisoners so nobody would get bombed. So they opened all the cells and the prisoners went out. Some left and some decided to stay with us. They didn't know where to go. The Germans bombed for hours, but the prison never once got hit. The planes came in waves all day long and at five o'clock in the afternoon they stopped. Today they have such big bombs that a little town like Siedlce could be destroyed in half an hour. At that time the bombs weren't so powerful. A whole group of planes would come - maybe ten or twelve - and fly over a street and drop fire bombs and the whole street would burn. The whole street would catch fire because there was no water. We had only pumps, and no one knew where the firemen were. They had horses but their horses wouldn't go down the burning streets. The windows of a house would be open, a curtain would fly out and catch fire, and the house would burn. One

house caught fire from another. At every tenth house they would drop a bomb which wouldn't burn but would explode and demolish the whole house. Most of the dead were in the houses that exploded, because people could escape the burning houses. At five o'clock the planes would stop. They bombed the whole week.

We didn't stay in town. The prison had large horse-drawn wagons so we all got on those wagons and drove to a little village about ten kilometers outside of Siedlce and asked the farmers if we could stay in their huts. We lay in the fields and watched the planes fly over and we could see the bombs falling and the city burning. After five, when the planes left, we would go back to the city and see what we could save from our houses. The city looked like a ghost town. We walked in the middle of the street, while houses burned on both sides. We saw people scurrying about, carrying things. Our house was not burned so we went in and got some clothes, whatever we could carry. That was about three or four days after the bombing started.

Warsaw was surrounded by the Germans. The inhabitants fought very hard, even children fought. They were under siege twenty-one days — bombarded every day from the air - and they held out. The Germans asked them to give in but they didn't. Finally they surrendered.¹⁰⁶

In the meantime the government announced that all men aged seventeen to fifty-five or sixty who were able to carry arms should start walking east toward Brest because the government was reorganizing the army.¹⁰⁷ My father and Wit left, and I was left

¹⁰⁶ Warsaw surrendered on September 27, 1939, after a nineteen-day siege during which it was constantly bombarded. Biskupski, History, 102.

¹⁰⁷ According to Davies, the General Staff left Warsaw on September 6, the government on September 7. Davies, God's Playground, 2:440. Biskupski says they headed southeast toward Rumania,

alone with my mother, neither of us very prepared for the hardships of life. We were left sitting in this farmer's hut with no money, not knowing where to go and not knowing where the men were. They were supposed to walk to Brest so they all got together and left. We couldn't find out where they were because there were no communications.

We stayed there for a week, mother and I. The farmer told us to burn our passports so nobody would know we were Jewish. This was a dumb idea. People knew who we were even without a passport, but stupid as we were, we burned them. We sat there and this farmer gave us some potatoes to eat. Then the bombing stopped and the rumor arose that the Germans were in Siedlce. Somebody said that he saw the Germans drive into town and that the town was burning itself out. People started saying maybe we should go back and see what was left. So some women got together and decided to walk to Siedlce. My mother didn't want me to go but I did. We put on long peasant skirts and went into the city to see what was happening. During our walk, we met people on the road. Everybody was crawling out of their holes. They told us that during the bombardment a lot of Jewish people had gone to a camp for poor Jewish children and stayed in the camp buildings. We found my aunt there. Her house had burned and we hadn't known where she was.

Siedlce was burned out. It was full of army tanks and German soldiers.¹⁰⁸ When I saw those first German soldiers I did not think they were human. They were all dressed in

hoping to form a new defensive line in the east. Biskupski, *History*, 102. Dawidowicz says that on September 7 the military ordered all able-bodied men to leave Warsaw and about 100,000 began moving eastward. She does not indicate if this was to form a new army. Dawidowicz, *War*, 198. In any event, the Soviet Union invaded from the east on September 17, 1939, striking the final blow. The last Polish unit surrendered on October 5 at Kock. Davies, *God's Playground*, 2:437-438.

¹⁰⁸ The German army entered Siedlce on September 11, 1939. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Siedlce."

black leather jackets with big rivets, pants, gloves, boots and big helmets. Even their big motorcycles were covered with leather. That was in the beginning of the war when they still had everything. Later on they didn't look like this. They roared down the streets on their motorcycles but nobody stopped us. We walked the streets and decided that we would not separate. If one of us wanted to see her house, we would all go because we were afraid we would be attacked. We walked to my house and it was still there; the door was locked just as we left it. It wasn't looted, though some houses were. The Yomtov house stayed up too. The whole street burned down except their house. The walls were plastered with notices in German and Polish; they said we should come back - the Germans had established a government for the province and life was going to return to normal.

When we returned to the village, I told my mother what I had seen. We decided to go back to Siedlce. We realized that there were a lot of people burned out of their houses, that we would have to take in some people, that we could no longer live in three, four rooms by ourselves. Since my mother couldn't walk back to Siedlce, I hired a farmer with a horse and buggy to drive me to the village so I could pick her up and bring her back. When I reached the village, someone told me that Sarah, David's sister, and Benjamin, her boyfriend, were in another village, and that Sarah wanted see me.

So we took the horse and buggy and went to see Sarah. The middle of the road was full of marching soldiers. Our farmer-driver got scared that the Germans would grab him because they were already grabbing men to build bridges and dig ditches, so he left us alone with the horse and buggy and told us he would come to town and get it back when we were finished. With my mother in the little wagon, I held the horse and walked

with it to the village where Sarah and Benjamin were. When we got there, we found them sitting around, having some fish for dinner. Benjamin's janitor had taken him to a nearby village where the janitor's relatives hid him. Sarah went with him. Her parents were in the Jewish children's camp, as were his parents. Sarah wanted to tell me to get in touch with her mother when I got back to Siedlce. I grabbed the horse and started going home. The next thing I knew, we were arrested, my mother and I, along with some other people who were on the road, and the Germans brought us to a place where there were about fifteen little wagons with horses and about two hundred people. They locked us all in a barn and there was shooting all around. Someone said they were going to shoot us in the morning because they thought we might be spying on them, but what could we have seen, a bunch of people who didn't even know what was going on. We were very scared but in the middle of the night some farmers opened the back of the barn and we escaped. Not everybody wanted to leave, but we grabbed our bundles and got out.

We got home and stayed home and my aunt and uncle and their two boys moved in. We still didn't know where my father and brother were, or where David was, and we didn't have any money. There were some potatoes in the cellar, but there was nothing else to eat.

The new government immediately announced that people should come to city hall and pick up coupons for bread. You would be allowed so much bread a day and certain bakeries were authorized to bake the bread. I had a friend whose father was one of these bakers. She told me they needed help cutting the loaves and giving them out because there were thousands of people lining up for the bread. Her father said if I helped out he would give me an additional loaf. So I went there to help and got our one or two loaves of

bread and didn't have to stand in line which was terrific. A few days passed and we needed money. A black market developed. People were selling everything because people whose homes had burned needed clothes and didn't have them. I had a lot of clothes, and I sold some so we got a few zlotys. The Germans didn't do anything. They left us alone. They didn't bother us in any way. In the meantime the Yomtovs came back but we still didn't know anything about David.

We didn't know anything because we were under German control and cut off from the east. The Germans told us they had occupied all of Poland, everything. In a few days, maybe ten days, my father and brother came back. They had walked almost to the Russian border. Luckily we had some friends who owned some land near the border. They got an estate from a Russian prince who owed them money. They had his IOU notes and since the Russian prince disappeared and abandoned the estate, the court gave them title to his property. It was mostly trenches from World War I with old cannons around. I used to visit them in the summer, and we were always afraid we'd dig up a body. My father and brother walked to this estate and when they got there these friends said that they were leaving because the Germans were coming. They advised them to return home because there was no place to go. So my father and Wit came back to Siedlce. One morning about two weeks later, we woke up to find all the Germans leaving town, just riding out. All kinds of rumors flew, but nobody knew why. The Russians were coming. By night the city was full of Russian soldiers.

What happened was that Stalin and Hitler had signed a pact, which wasn't known until after the war broke out. They had established a secret frontier between Russia and Germany which was supposed to be the Bug River. Siedlce was between the Vistula to

the west and the Bug to the east, about ten miles from the Bug. Hitler said that the border would be the Bug, so we were on the German side. Later, Stalin demanded that the Vistula be the border, so Hitler withdrew and the Russians came in.¹⁰⁹

The Russians came in and it was like day and night because the Russians didn't look like the Germans. They wore Russian greatcoats and came in wagons, and they would eat a little piece of bread from their pocket. They bought everything in sight: old razor blades, watches, nightgowns. The officers had women with them who wore nightgowns on the street as dresses. So the commerce started and everybody thought that if the Russians stayed, maybe the worst was over. We were not Communists, but at least we didn't hear about the Russians what we heard about Hitler.

They stayed maybe five or six days, not longer.¹¹⁰ But the day they were going to leave they let it be known that anybody who wanted to go with them could go. They even offered to send trucks to drive people's furnishings across the Bug. They also said people could bring their belongings to the train station, and they would take them across the Bug. Anybody who wanted could cross the Bug. Lots of people went. The Russians sent cars and people loaded up their things and went across the river to a small town called Drohiczyn. They all stayed in this small town. They didn't go into Russia. They all figured that they would stay in what was formerly Poland, where they felt at home. This

¹⁰⁹ The secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, signed August 23, 1939, by the prime ministers of the Soviet Union and Germany, stated that Poland was to be divided at the Vistula River, with the Germans taking the land west of the Vistula, the Russians the territory east. Since Siedlce was east of the Vistula, it should have been in Soviet hands. However, the Germans went past the line and then withdrew to let the Russians take over. On September 29, Stalin agreed to move the demarcation line east to the Bug River, so Siedlce fell again under German control. Davies, *God's Playground*, 2:433; Gilbert, *Second World War*, 16. Since the Germans entered Siedlce on September 11, and the Russians invaded Poland from the east on September 17, the Germans were probably in Siedlce less than the two weeks Ida mentions.

¹¹⁰ I assume they stayed until at least September 29.

small town had no way of accommodating the thousands of people who came over. There was no food. There was nothing, but people stayed there.¹¹¹

Then the Germans came back to Siedlce, but the situation still wasn't bad because the military governed. All the problems began when the civilian government was set up. Nevertheless, their return started a pilgrimage east. People from all over Poland started coming through Siedlce to get to the Russian side. A lot of people wanted to leave because they knew what the Germans were. A lot of people just went for business.¹¹² There was a lot of smuggling. People smuggled everything. People from all over ran to Russia to sell things and make money. Regular routes developed from Warsaw, and Siedlce became a center. People paid the border guards, and the guards let them pass.

My family thought about going to Russia, but we didn't go. The Yomtovs didn't go. My father was very much against the idea. Maybe he thought we would suffer there too. Also, England and France had joined Poland, and we thought the war wasn't going to last long. But a lot of people - not just from Siedlce, people from all over - poor people, people that had an inclination towards Communism, went. David's sister Leah was already on the Russian side with her family, the Rubensteins, and they stayed there. She lived in Sokolov, but her husband had a lumber mill across the river and in the summer they used to stay there. The area across the Bug was a big lumber area and people who were in the lumber business used to go there in the summer. In the winter when the land froze they would go there to mark the trees to cut and in the summer they

¹¹¹ I was unable to find any reference to this town, though a relative's family did go there. See footnote 114 below.

¹¹² There was much movement across the border before it was closed in December 1939, as people tried to decide whether life would be better on the German or Soviet-occupied side.

would bring the logs to the mills for cutting and export. David's sister, Chana, and her family, the Feinsilbers, were on the Russian side because they worked in the lumber mill, so they just stayed there. Later the Russians put them all on a train and sent them to Siberia. There they had a very, very hard life. They had to cut down trees and they didn't have food or proper clothing. It wasn't a concentration camp, but it was very, very rough. Chana died there. The children didn't have it so bad because Russia tried to make Communists out of them. They were separated from the parents and put in schools. They slept in school dormitories and ate there; the food wasn't fancy but they didn't starve. On school holidays they would visit their parents and bring them some bread. Later when the Germans attacked Stalingrad and it looked like Russia might lose the war, Stalin realized that Communism would not get the people to fight - you have to fight for a country - so he started a big campaign to save Mother Russia. Many Russians who were not very enthusiastic about Communism were very patriotic when it came to Mother Russia. They started fighting. He also enlisted the help of the Polish soldiers who were in Russia. He promised that if they would join the army and fight, he would free all the Polish citizens who were in Siberia. And he kept his word. He supplied them with trains and told them they could go wherever they wanted to go. It was so cold in Siberia that they all got on the trains and went south.¹¹³ I think the Rubensteins and Feinsilbers

¹¹³ Approximately 300,000 Polish Jews fled into Soviet-occupied Poland. Dawidowicz, *War*, 396. There they soon had difficulties with the authorities who suspected them, incredible as it seems, of being Nazi spies because they wanted to stay near the border, near relatives who remained in German-occupied Poland. "Mass Soviet deportations started early in 1940 and continued in several waves until the outbreak of war [with Germany] in June 1941. Estimates of the number of Jews involved...range from 50,000 to half a million. A semi-official source puts the figure at 250,000...The deportees...were treated brutally... Many died of hunger, disease, and overwork at the camps in northern Russia and Siberia. However, there were no exterminations." Nora Levin, *The Holocaust* (New York: Schocken, 1973), 270.

In August 1941, after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, Russia established relations with the Polish government-in-exile and agreed to grant a general amnesty to all Poles, Jewish and non-Jewish, in

wound up in Uzbekistan.¹¹⁴ Alexander Rubenstein was a good businessman and started doing all kinds of trading, so their situation improved. As soon as the 1948 war in Israel ended, they went to Israel. Alexander was going to open an export-import business there, but the day after he got the license, he had a stroke and died.

The civilian government was set up in October, about a month or six weeks after the invasion.¹¹⁵ They began issuing decrees immediately. It was very bad. The government headquarters was in the national bank building, which was across the street from our apartment.¹¹⁶ We used to keep our windows closed all day with the drapes drawn because we were afraid they might come in any minute and kill us. There were curfews.¹¹⁷ Jews were not allowed to walk on the sidewalks -we had to walk in the middle of the street. The men had to take off their hats when a German passed. The

exchange for a promise that Polish soldiers would help the Soviets fight Germany. A "Polish army in Russia" was formed under the command of General Wladyslaw Anders, and thousands of Polish refugees and deportees soon left Siberia and headed south. Davies, Heart, 76.

¹¹⁴ During a visit to his home, Kibbutz Eilon in Israel, Avigdor Rubenstein, Leah's son, told me that his family left their home in Sokolow Podlaski and crossed the Bug to the nearby town of Drohiczyn. They stayed there because they wanted to be near their home. The Soviets wanted them to become Soviet citizens but they refused because they feared they would then be unable to return to Poland. The Soviets then arrested them and sent them to Siberia. They spent about eighteen months there, near Archangel, in very difficult conditions. They left Siberia in 1941 after Stalin granted an amnesty to all Poles - Jewish and non-Jewish - living in the Soviet Union in return for a promise that Polish soldiers would help the Soviets in their fight against Germany. The Rubensteins took the train to Bukhara where they stayed until they went to Israel.

¹¹⁵ Siedlce was in the part of occupied Poland called the General Government and placed under German civil administration. The General Government included four districts - Cracow, Lublin, Radom, and Warsaw - each of which had its own governor, under the authority of the Governor General Hans Frank. Dawidowicz, War, 394. There were about 1,400,000 Jews in this area. Hilberg, Destruction, 67.

¹¹⁶ Ida's family lived at 2 Wojskowa, opposite the Bank Polski.

¹¹⁷ A December 11, 1939, decree prohibited Jews from being on the streets from nine p.m. to five a.m. Hilberg, Destruction, 75.

schools were closed, and around the end of November or December they required the armbands, first in Warsaw.¹¹⁸

In the meantime we needed money. We didn't have any money and we still had the shoes lying there in the prison. My father got in touch with some people in Warsaw who said if he could bring some shoes to Warsaw -not thousands of pairs but some - they could sell them because the Germans were buying things in the stores. My father couldn't go because men were often arrested. We decided that I would go to Warsaw with some shoes and see if these people would buy them. It was dangerous, but there was no other way. It was also dangerous because I didn't wear an armband. If the Germans caught you without a band they shot you. They only had one punishment for that. They didn't play around with anything else. I took twelve pairs of ski shoes. I couldn't carry more and the trains were crowded — you had to hang on. I went very early in the morning — you couldn't go out at night — while it was still dark, as soon as the curfew lifted. The shoes were in two heavy packages. I preferred sitting in the station to walking through the city in daylight because I was afraid that the people in Siedlce who knew me would see me. I got to Warsaw and in Warsaw I wasn't so afraid because nobody knew me. I made about three or four trips, taking shoes and bringing back other things.

After a while we couldn't get into the prison any more because the Germans were there, so one man in Warsaw suggested that I bring leather back to Siedlce. A couple of the men who worked with my father needed money so they agreed to work with the leather. So I went to Warsaw and bought leather. I didn't know much about it but I

¹¹⁸ The decree requiring all Jews over the age of ten in the General Government to wear armbands was issued on November 23, 1939. The armband had to be white, at least four inches wide, with a Jewish star. Gilbert, Second World War, 28.

learned fast. I bought big skins and had them rolled up and brought them to Siedlce. We cut them in the house and the workers made shoes. Then I carried the shoes to Warsaw to sell and brought a little money into the house.

In the meantime, in November, David's younger brother Israel and older brother Moshe decided they wanted to cross the river to look for David because we still didn't know where he was. So they both went, leaving only Sarah and Jacob with David's parents.

The Germans began to demand all kinds of things.¹¹⁹ One day they came to our house and took all my mother's linen. It was a miracle she didn't have a heart attack. My mother told me that when she got married, she embroidered blue silk pillowcases and did needlepoint on cream silk bed sheets. She had piles of these linens tied up with blue silk ribbons. This German came in with a woman - I think she was a prostitute - went to the linen closet, took everything out and told the woman to take what she wanted. She took everything. My mother couldn't say a word. One day they wanted silver. One day they wanted gold. One day they wanted twelve fur coats. The Gestapo came to town and one of my uncles was elected to be the liaison. He would go there in the morning and come back yellow with fear, with lists. They wanted damask tablecloths, they wanted a silver service. Sometimes people had it and sometimes they didn't have it because the bombs had destroyed it.

Then we found out that David was alive. I don't remember exactly how. Somebody came from the other side of the Bug and said he saw him. Then a letter came

¹¹⁹ The Germans began confiscating Jewish businesses and robbing Jewish stores immediately. Jews were ordered to surrender their gold and jewelry; non-compliance meant death. Often the Germans took hostages to extort money from the Jews. Dawidowicz, *War*, 200.

from David's two brothers Israel and Moshe saying that they had a room some place there and they were all together. At the same time a rumor was circulating around town that the Gestapo wanted a pound of gold from the Jews of Siedlce, and if they didn't get it, they were going to take twelve hostages and hang them. At that time who had a pound of gold? We didn't know if it was true or not, but the rumor was that one of the Yomtovs was going to be one of the hostages, so there was great panic. We decided to get the father to the Russian side. The oldest Yomtov brother, Jacob, was still in Siedlce too. He was the only married brother and he had four kids. He decided he wanted to go along because if his father was not there the Gestapo would take him. The mother couldn't go because she was too old and we were not afraid for her, only them.

So we hired a sleigh to drive them to the Bug, and I went along to see that they got across safely. We drove to the river, where someone waited for them and took them across. I rode back alone in the sleigh. It was past curfew and there was nobody out in the town. When I got home - it must have been about eight or nine o'clock - my father was very angry. It was not really late but the curfew was six o'clock and I was a young woman by myself with this driver who was one of the professional smugglers.¹²⁰ Also, at night we put barricades on the entrance so nobody would get in. I had to knock and everybody in the house was terrified because if you heard a knock...

The Yomtovs stayed there a few days and then the rumor about the gold quieted down, and the father and Jacob came back. In December, one bright afternoon in December, David came back. Somebody came running, said David was at his parents'

¹²⁰ The December 1939 decree set the curfew at nine p.m. See footnote 117 above.

house and wanted to see me immediately. So I went and he was there. He looked terrible. He was wearing high boots like a farmer, and he said,

"I came to get you. You always wanted to go to school. You wanted to be an engineer. In Russia you have an opportunity because they don't have any prejudice against women. Women there do all kinds of work and if you go to school there the government pays you. So I came for you. You can come with me. I have this man who brought me. He will take us both back tonight."

I told him I would not go. My father would not go. My father had ex-prisoners who lived across the Bug who wanted him to come and offered to hide him. They wrote him letters asking him why he wouldn't come, but he just didn't want to go to Russia. He was so stubborn. I felt I could not go because it would kill him. I felt I had done enough damage with all the things I was doing and that would be the final blow. So as much as I wanted to go with David I just couldn't. My mother said to me, "Look, if you want to go with him, just go. I don't want you to go, but I am not going to stand in your way."

I told David I just couldn't do it to my parents. He was a little worried about his parents too, because they also didn't feel like going, so he said to me, "Look, let me go back to Russia and bring back Srultcheh."¹²¹ He felt very protective towards this brother because he was crippled. He said, "Let me go and get him and I will come back and stay here and whatever happens happens. If you don't want to go, OK." That night he left to get his brother, and he did not return until March. The Germans suddenly strengthened the border guard and caught a lot of people. It turned out that the smugglers took money from people who wanted to cross and then told the border guards when they would be

¹²¹ Diminutive for Israel.

crossing. The border guards would stop the whole transport, strip the people of whatever they carried - money, jewelry, furs - and split it with the smugglers.

One of these crooks was a Jew, Kopplin, a horse dealer, who was imprisoned before the war for injecting some racing horses and army horses. When the war began, he was released, and he organized a group of smugglers. He told people he was paying off the guards, but actually he was in league with them. He would take money from people, supposedly to bribe the guards, but then he would tell the guards what the people were carrying. The guards would stop the people and take away everything they were smuggling and split the goods with him. Later they shot him.

In the meantime David's mother took very sick, and there was no medical help. She had liver problems all her life and every year she would go to Carlsbad or some other spa and drink the water. During the war she couldn't go. At that time we didn't know that she had cancer, but she was in tremendous pain and she was getting weaker and sicker. Finally we got in touch with her doctor. He said that if we could smuggle her into the hospital, he would operate on her and see what was what.

We had to smuggle her into the hospital because Jews were no longer allowed in a Polish hospital. There was no Jewish hospital. The doctor was not Jewish, so he was not supposed to treat her, but he had been her doctor many years and he knew her. We managed to get her in unseen, and he operated. He told us that he really didn't do anything, because when he opened her he saw that she had cancer of the liver. There was nothing he could do, so he just closed her up. He thought she might live a short time longer. She left the hospital on a Saturday afternoon, and we carried her home in the hospital bed because there was no ambulance.

One Saturday afternoon, it must have been early spring, before David's return, someone came and said that the Gestapo was in the Yomtovs' house. I ran down and found Mrs. Yomtov in the yard. She said the Gestapo came and threw her out of the house but kept her husband inside. They were searching for something. There was nothing we could do. We stayed in the yard and waited. After about an hour, the Gestapo left and we went up. The house was unbelievable. All their food was piled up in the middle of the living room floor - rice, sugar, flour, jams - with oil and water poured on it. Totally unusable. Every piece of furniture was turned over, every clock torn off of the walls. They were looking for gold - because he was a rich Jew - and they thought it was hidden in the walls, so they tore everything down. He was lying in the middle of the mess. It was Saturday, so the silver candlesticks were on the table, and they had hit him with the candlesticks. He had a cut, but he was alive. We cleaned up and put things away as best we could. Then I went home.

Among the Gestapo men was one who was seven feet tall who always walked with two tremendous dogs that would attack people in the streets. He would sic them on people. His name was Karl. I don't know what his last name was. That night, about eleven or twelve o'clock, there was a loud knock on the Yomtovs' door. You can imagine their fright. They opened the door and saw this Karl. He was polite as can be. "Please," he said in German, "go back to bed and don't worry, everything is all right." Then he went to the living room and opened the closet. The Yomtovs had a tremendous collection of records, especially opera. He took out the record player and some records, sat down on a chair, put his feet on the table and played the music. You can imagine how well they slept. He listened to the music for about an hour, put everything neatly back in the closet,

closed the door, said "Danke schön" - thank you- and left. Later people said that he was not normal. Probably he wasn't. It was a form of sadism - after destroying the whole house in the day, to come at night and listen to their records - he could have taken the records and played them in his own house. Instead he sat and enjoyed the music while they lay terrified in their bed because they didn't know if he was going to kill them when the music was over.

All this time Siedlce was getting a lot of refugees from other cities. The Germans took west Poland and created a separate state which did not include the area where we were; this western area was incorporated into Germany.¹²² The Germans expelled all the Jews from the western part, so they came to our area, but since so many houses had burned down, there was no housing - it was terrible. The Yomtovs were alone and had several undamaged rooms so they took in some of those families. They kept only one room for themselves. It was terrible for them because they lost the last vestige of what they were and what they had. The store downstairs was closed.¹²³ The Germans took away a trainload of sugar and a boatload of oil and gave them a little piece of paper saying that when the war was over they would get paid for this oil and sugar. They were in their seventies and they were all alone.

¹²² The uprooting of Jews began soon after the invasion of Poland. As early as September 21, 1939, Security Police Chief Reinhard Heydrich issued an order directing all 540,000 Jews living in Gdansk, West Prussia (the corridor), Poznan, and Eastern Upper Silesia - the areas later incorporated into the Greater Reich - to leave and to move to the interior of Poland, the occupied part later called the General Government. There they were to be concentrated in cities located at railroad junctions or on rail lines. All Jewish communities of less than five hundred people were to be dissolved and the inhabitants transferred to the nearest city. Hilberg, Destruction, 65, 67. Over the next year about 300,000 Jews and 1,200,000 Poles were uprooted and sent east. Levin, Holocaust, 157.

¹²³ The Yomtovs lived in an apartment above their store at 9 Stary Rynek.

Finally, in March, David came back. This was after his mother's operation. She was already so ill that he knew. First he sent his two brothers. It was the last chance -the ice had broken and they had to jump from one piece to another. When he came he was all wet and his clothes were frozen to him. He wore a sheepskin coat and the leather was like ice. He almost didn't make it. When I saw him, an hour after he arrived, he was still shivering. In the meantime things were getting worse and worse. We all had to wear the armbands and we were afraid to go into town because the Germans were grabbing people every day for work.¹²⁴ But the food situation wasn't too bad yet, because you could buy food from the Poles on the black market.

One day the Germans announced that Jews were not allowed to wear furs.¹²⁵ Anyone they caught with even a fur button would be shot. A lot of people gave the furs away. My father couldn't do it. He put the fur in a box and buried it in the backyard. He said he would rather let it rot than give it to the Germans. When people went into the ghetto, they gave a lot of things away for safekeeping to people they thought were their friends, but it didn't always turn out that way. The Yomtovs gave a lot of jewelry, furs and money to a man who owned a large store, like a delicatessen, with fancy imported foods. They knew him because of their business. His name was Papuski. When they needed something they were supposed to get in touch with him and he was supposed to give it to them or sell something for them and give them the money. He never did

¹²⁴ Governor Frank issued a decree making forced labor compulsory for all Jewish males aged fourteen through sixty on October 26, 1939, but Germans randomly seized Jews off the streets for forced labor from the start of the occupation. Dawidowicz, War, 202.

¹²⁵ The Germans confiscated the furs of Polish Jews in December 1941. *Ibid.*, 209.

anything for them. We found out later that he took things - diamonds, jewelry - from a lot of Jews and never gave anything to anyone.¹²⁶

Later, when the Germans liquidated the ghetto, one Jewish man, Ziskind Rosenbaum, a hefty guy, somehow survived. He joined the partisans in the woods, and one day he came into Papuski's store and shot him point blank. Rosenbaum was from a well-to-do family and Papuski had his family's stuff. The Germans caught him because he didn't have time to escape. I think they hung him.

Everybody thought the war was just going to blow over and life would return to normal. A girlfriend of mine whose family had a big store with hats and shoes gave the store to a Pole to run. He was supposed to help them out too - like give them money from the store so they could buy food. When the Germans liquidated the big ghetto, my friend didn't go to the Umschlagplatz. She had a little baby and she went to see the Pole. She managed to get to his house and she knocked on the door, but he didn't even let her into the house. She started walking back and on the way the Germans shot her. But she didn't die. When they were gathering the dead, the Jewish police found her and put her in the hospital. The baby was dead, but she only had shots in her hands because she was holding the baby when they were shooting. She was left for dead and she survived. So there were people that survived by some sort of a miracle. The fact that people miraculously survived is no secret. But people you trusted and you thought you knew - businessmen and friends - people you thought would help you - took advantage. They

¹²⁶ Emmanuel Ringelblum, the famous Polish-Jewish historian who chronicled life in the Warsaw ghetto, noted that many Jews who gave their belongings to Christian clients or acquaintances for safekeeping never got them back. In the worst cases, the Pole actually denounced the Jew so he could keep the property. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, ed. Joseph Kermish and Shmuel Krakowski, trans. Dafna Allon, Danuta Dabrowska and Dana Keren (Evanston,

didn't give you anything and sometimes they almost pushed you back into the mud. A lot of Poles didn't measure up. On the other hand, sometimes in unexpected places you met somebody who helped you. So, you always took a chance, but since there was just life or death... Really you were sort of prepared to die. You just took a chance and if it worked out, it worked out and if didn't it didn't.

At about that time we began to hear talk of the ghettos. There were no communications between cities. You only found out what was going on in another city if somebody came and told you. The Germans started talking about making ghettos for Jews and gypsies together. In Lodz they made a very large ghetto; they gathered the people from the small towns around Lodz and put them there.¹²⁷ My mother's brother lived in Lodz; he had a store there. His wife came to Siedlce and brought some stuff from the store and said that she would like to get the family out. She asked us to keep the stuff so she could sell it and make some money. Nobody had money unless you were a black marketer and we were not. We didn't know how to handle this type of situation. She went back to Lodz, and the whole family perished there in the ghetto. They just starved. They never got out.

When the Germans set up a ghetto, they also set up a Judenrat, a Jewish council. The council members were at the beck and call of the Nazis and a lot of them had a terrible time. When they established the ghetto in Warsaw the president of the Judenrat was Adam Cziernakow, a Jewish engineer. The Nazis started demanding people to send

Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 77.

¹²⁷ The first major ghetto was created in Lodz in April 1940. The Warsaw ghetto was established in October 1940. Ghettos were established in Cracow in March 1941 and in Lublin, Radom, Czestochowa, and Kielce in April 1941. Hilberg, *Destruction*, 79. Most Jews in the incorporated territories and in General Government Poland were confined in ghettos by the end of 1941. Idem, 84.

to Treblinka. They didn't tell the Jews Treblinka was a death camp. They told them it was a labor camp, but Cziernakow did not believe them. He knew. Every day he was supposed to deliver a thousand people but he went home and committed suicide because he knew he was sending people to their death. There were other people who did not care as long as they could save their own skin. In Lodz the head of the Judenrat acted like a Jewish king, and the Germans made a joke out of him. They printed money with his picture and they saluted him. He was worse than a Nazi. He would sell out people. He would go around dressed in a uniform and beat people up on the streets because he thought that the more loyalty he showed to the Nazis, the more he did what they wanted, the safer he would be. Of course they finished him off too. It was stupid what he did.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ "Judenrat" is the German word for a Jewish council. The Nazis set up Judenräte in many of the countries they conquered and occupied. Both Heydrich and Frank issued orders commanding all Jewish communities in German-occupied Poland to elect Judenräte, Frank on November 28, 1939, Heydrich on September 21, 1939, as the second part of his order evicting Jews from the part of Poland that was to be incorporated into the Greater Reich. Hilberg, *Destruction*, 75, 67. Both made it clear that members of the Judenrat would be held personally responsible for the timely and complete implementation of all Nazi orders. Idem, 77. The Judenräte were first responsible for moving the Jews to the cities of General Government Poland and then for moving them into ghettos. Once in the ghettos, the functions of the Judenräte increased even as the resources available to them decreased. In addition to the usual religious, educational and welfare functions of the pre-war kehillot, the Judenrat now had to tend to the housing, health and sanitation needs of its distressed population. It had to provide police and fire protection. It had to care for orphans and refugees. Last but not least, it had to fulfill Nazi demands – for information, for money, for property, for labor, and finally for lives.

The Judenräte's role in the extermination of the Jews has been much debated, with some writers arguing that they could have done more to save their people, and others contending that they did the most they could in the face of overwhelming Nazi strength and hostile native populations. A critic of the Judenräte, Hilberg alleges that their compliance with Nazi demands made them a "tool for the destruction of the Jewish community." Idem, 62. He contends that Judenrat members indulged in rationalization when they justified compliance with orders to supply workers or deportees by arguing that disobedience would imperil the entire community. Idem, 303-304. He sees their response as a continuation of the response pattern developed by Jews over centuries of persecution, centuries which had shown that compliance and alleviation attempts were more effective than force or resistance in dealing with a strong foe. Idem, 23.

Dawidowicz is more sympathetic to the Judenräte. She points out that most Jewish leaders who agreed to serve on the Judenrat did so reluctantly, with great misgivings, accepting only because they felt a sense of responsibility to the community. They quickly learned that there were no realistic alternatives to compliance as "[c]ouncil members who resisted German orders...were removed by terror, in a continuing process of deadly attrition." Dawidowicz, *War*, 228. In a short period of time, hundreds of Judenrat members were taken hostage, arrested, killed, or sent to labor camps. Idem, 227. Their replacements were sometimes men of lesser character who quickly decided that resistance was futile. According to

In the meantime David's mother died. David returned from Russia in March 1940 and she died on July 14. She was seventy-two. We were able to have her funeral at the regular cemetery because we were not in a closed ghetto yet.¹²⁹ But my home situation was becoming very tense because the Nazi command post was across the street. Also, the Nazis used to run around and grab people off the streets for work. They grabbed people and held them until the work was done. Sometimes they beat them, sometimes they killed them, sometimes they let them go. It was unpredictable. If someone got caught, you never knew if he would come back in one piece or at all.¹³⁰

Nobody knew exactly where the ghetto was going to be, but we had a good idea that it would be in the poorest part of the city.¹³¹ The Poles were certainly not going to give up the best houses. There was also the problem with the Volksdeutsch which made everything worse. A lot of people who we thought were Polish were actually German.

Dawidowicz, "Judenrat officials could he said to have had, in theory, a limited range of alternatives to unresisting compliance, [but] in practice every alternative ended in death." Idem, 351. Noncompliance with orders generally met with reprisals, collective punishment, or threats to destroy the entire community. Under the circumstances, the Judenrat believed they could do little more than beg for exemptions or minor concessions and sacrifice some to save the rest.

Each Judenrat had a chairman, and the chairmen had different reputations. Adam Czerniakow, head of the Warsaw Judenrat, was considered a decent man. When rumors began to spread about impending deportation, he asked the Germans and was assured the rumors were unfounded. On July 22, 1942, he was told he had to deliver six thousand Jews that day and every day thereafter for resettlement. He tried to negotiate for some exemptions, but when he was unable to save children, he went home and took cyanide. Idem, 300-301. In contrast, Mordecai Rumkowski, chairman of the Lodz Judenrat, was regarded as a "crude megalomaniac." Idem, 240. Despised, he nevertheless displayed political savvy in creating ghetto industries, thus prolonging lives by bringing money into the ghetto and making Jews useful to the Nazis. Idem, 232.

¹²⁹ Ida's chronology is confused here. The Siedlce ghetto was not set up until August 1941; it was closed October 1, 1941. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Siedlce."

¹³⁰ Jews who were seized for work were often held incommunicado so their families did not know if they were dead or alive. Dawidowicz, War, 202.

¹³¹ The ghettoization process followed a pattern. Local officials picked the site, usually a dilapidated area already densely populated by Jews, issued the order to move, and then closed the ghetto, sometimes with barbed wire, sometimes with stone or brick walls. Hilberg, Destruction, 83. Sometimes the ghettos were situated in outlying areas without lighting, sewage or sanitation facilities. Dawidowicz,

Later they called themselves Volksdeutsch. They were of German descent and they belonged to German clubs like Singverein, Liederverein. They were all fronts for military organizations. When the Germans arrived, suddenly those people unmasked. They knew everything, they knew everybody, there was no hiding. You could tell them that you were a Turk, but they knew who you were. They had set up organizations that were really only set on spying. My father knew a Volksdeutsch man who lived near the area where we thought the ghetto would be. He was an engineer named Lehmann. He had a nice house with a big garden. My father figured that if there was going to be a ghetto Lehmann would have to move, so he got in touch with Lehmann and said that he would like to arrange a swap. Since Lehmann was a Volksdeutsch, he could move into our apartment because he wouldn't mind living across the street from the Germans.

When my father was arranging the swap he told Lehmann that he would leave all our furniture because he didn't want to lose it and when the war was over we would switch back. We had really beautiful furniture. In fact, before we left our house, the Gestapo came and took my desk and a chair. We were so naive. We thought that everything was going to be all right, that we would move back and get back our house. How little we knew what Hitler really was, despite the fact that we lived so close. Lehmann's wife didn't leave anything in her house - anything of value she took. She had a bed of tulips and she asked that we not spoil this bed of tulips, that we not plant anything because they were her prize tulips. She was the woman who would not let you into her house when you went to visit Siedlce. Wit is convinced that she still has the family furniture. Every time he went to Siedlce, he tried to get into the house but she

never let him in. Our house was burned down in 1945 when the Russians came, but her house is still standing. The ghetto was liquidated in 1942, so she moved back into her own house and simply took our furniture with her. Anyway, my father worked on this swap because he thought we might as well live in this house if there was going to be a ghetto.

While the rumors of the ghetto circulated, David and I got married. It was September 6, 1940. We still were in our old apartment so it was a very small wedding, with just the family and some neighbors - about thirty people. We managed to get some meat and bake some cakes and make a nice dinner, but I did not have a white wedding dress or veil or anything of that sort. We were married by an uncle of David's named Lew. He wasn't really a rabbi but we went to the city hall before so it didn't matter. I remember I refused to go to the mikveh.¹³² It wasn't really what you would call a religious wedding although it was done by this man. He was a real holy man and he understood that you had to be flexible. He was married to a sister of David's mother. David's mother's family, the Riddels, made a lot of money in trade but they were not very educated people, so they married their three daughters to students from the yeshiva.¹³³ Lew never said a loud word. He studied the Torah his whole life. And he

¹³² A mikveh is a body of water in which a person who has become impure purifies himself or herself by immersion. In orthodox Judaism a women is supposed to go to the mikveh at the end of each menstrual period. The focus is spiritual, not physical, cleanliness.

¹³³ The yeshiva (Hebrew "seat") was the secondary school a traditional Jewish male attended after receiving his elementary education in the heder. The yeshivot (plural) taught only the Talmud and the commentaries, no secular subjects. They used a dialectic method called "pilpul" which was supposed to sharpen the intellect. Some yeshivot were private but most were run by the kehillot which had some control over their policies. There were some very famous yeshivot in Poland and Lithuania in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Heller, *Edge*, 25, 158.

lived in great poverty. He had several children. The oldest one, a son, Lefke, became a Zionist. To those religious Jews it was like converting to Christianity.

At that time there was a society in Poland called the Tarbut, an educational society interested in teaching Hebrew a modern way.¹³⁴ They opened a Hebrew school in Siedlce, a modern Hebrew school, not a heder.¹³⁵ They didn't teach religious subjects. Some kids would go to the public school and come to the Tarbut school in the afternoon to learn Hebrew, and some studied there all day because they taught the other subjects too. Lefke became a teacher. He shaved his beard, he put on a regular suit and hat, not the square hat. His family thought that he had converted. During the war, he was in a camp but he survived. After the war they took him to Sweden because he was very sick. From Sweden he went back to Germany. There he met a girl from Siedlce and they married and emigrated to the United States. They wound up in New York. Somehow he got our address and we got in touch. On one of my Labor Day visits to New York, I went to see him. He lived in a house in Brooklyn on Ocean Drive. There was a big complex and there must have been five little shuls in this complex. He worked until noon on Friday and all Saturday he would sit and pray. It was amazing how pious he had become.

¹³⁴ Tarbut (Hebrew "culture") was an educational and cultural organization that established schools in most Eastern European countries between the wars. It was especially active in Poland. Tarbut schools had a Zionist orientation and used Hebrew as the language of instruction. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Tarbut." They were supported by the Zionists who saw them as a counterbalance to the Bund schools, which were anti-Zionist and taught in Yiddish. Marcus, *Social*, 152. In inter-war Poland it appears that each Jewish political movement had its own schools. In some communities there were enough Jews to create a Jewish elementary school, but no school was established because the Jews could not agree on the language of instruction or the school's political orientation. Heller, *Edge*, 222.

¹³⁵ The heder (Hebrew "room") was the traditional elementary school where Jewish boys aged three to thirteen began their education. The teacher, called a melamed or a rebbe, was paid by the students' parents and taught in his home. The children learned Hebrew and then advanced to the study of the Torah and Talmud. There were no secular subjects taught. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Heder." Traditional Jews considered study of the Torah "the fountain of life," and consequently tried to provide at least a

After we got married David went back to his parents' house and I stayed at my house because we had no place to live. Later we started rearranging rooms so we could be together. David's father didn't like the idea that we were not together after we married because it was against Jewish law. My uncle also thought that it was not right. He and my aunt lived in the room which used to be mine. They let me have my room back so David came over to stay. He stayed there half of September, October and November. In December 1940 the swap took place. We packed up our things and moved into Lehmann's house, and Lehmann moved into our apartment.¹³⁶ Lehmann's house was quite big and we knew we could not live there alone. We figured if the Germans set up the ghetto there would be two families to a room, so we tried to find some people we could get along with so it wouldn't be so bad. There were a lot of hooligans - Jewish hooligans - who would just come into your house and move in and if you had food they ate it because they were hungry and you had it. It was war. By that time my father was terribly depressed. He was a man of action. He was used to coming and going, meeting people and handling a factory. Here he was reduced to sitting home, afraid to be caught by the Germans, not providing for his family. I was the one who did the errands, so he felt he was useless, like he was nothing anymore. It affected him very, very badly. The only thing which made him feel a little better was that he arranged this move. It made him feel he could still do something. But it was very hard for him. He was a big strong man in his early fifties, very active, and he was always in charge of big business, big deals. All of a sudden it was all gone. It was really very sad. He would sit there all day,

minimal education to all Jewish males. Heller, Edge, 25.

¹³⁶ The Lehmann home was at 25 Aslanowicza St.

and my mother would look at him and cry. You were very, very afraid to let a man out because the Germans could catch him.

Wit was seventeen years old and getting ready to go to the university.¹³⁷ He wanted to go to medical school. He had a lot of Polish friends, and he got involved with the Polish underground. My parents tried to keep him home, but he went out a lot. So, we moved to this house in the ghetto. We took in our dentist and his wife and a woman who owned a flour mill. The Germans let her run the mill because they needed flour. She needed a helper so she got my father to help her at the mill. This was a great boon because it enabled him to get a special pass which said he was needed for the military effort. The pass allowed him to walk to the mill - nowhere else - without worrying about getting caught on the street. The work gave him something to do, so it made him feel useful again. He would bring home a little flour and grain, so it helped out with the food shortage. We had twelve people in the house.

About two weeks after we moved in, the Germans announced they were setting up a ghetto in this area.¹³⁸ They went down the street where we used to live and other streets where Jews lived and they told everyone that in thirty minutes they had to leave. What could people take in thirty minutes? What would you grab if someone gave you thirty minutes to leave your house? There was no transportation. You couldn't take furniture and by the time you stopped crying or got over the shock, the thirty minutes were gone. The Germans posted guards all over. They did not use the army - it was all Gestapo and special forces. It was unbelievable -the crying and the screaming was so loud that we

¹³⁷ Wit was born on February 18, 1921, so he was eighteen when the war began.

¹³⁸ Ida's chronology here is a bit confused, as the Siedlce ghetto was established in August 1941.

heard it where we lived seven or eight blocks away. Since we had friends there, we ran over to see what we could carry. Everybody grabbed something - a pillow, a bundle of clothes, food, whatever you could. Within thirty minutes the houses were emptied of people. The Germans came later and took everything away. A lot of Poles got stuff, but a lot the Germans took. A lot of Germans who worked for the civil government had brought their families and they settled in those vacated apartments. They pushed all those people - chased this crying, screaming crowd of people - a lot of them holding probably the least important thing - into the area where the ghetto was to be, which was already emptied of Poles. The Poles knew that there was going to be a ghetto - a lot of them moved out on their own accord. But no one thought the Germans would do it this way. In Warsaw they gave people time to move. Anyway, the Jews were all pushed into the ghetto and there were twenty people in a room and there were no beds and there was nothing. The children were crying - it was terrible. They began putting a barbed wire fence all around the area.

There was a large ghetto and a small one. The main street led to the Gestapo headquarters so that street was open. You could run through the street from one ghetto to the other, but you took your life in your hands because the Gestapo cars were constantly driving through.

Also, the Germans would play games. They would walk around the barbed wire fence and shoot whoever suited them. People who lived close to the barbed wire fence were afraid to stay near a window because the Germans would simply shoot through. They would catch somebody black marketeering and sentence them to death. Next to the ghetto gate was a little room which used to be the mikveh. There they would put people

sentenced to death. Then they would come and say, "Ok, we will let you go - just go." They would open the door, and when the person ran out, they would shoot him in the back. It was like a shooting gallery. Later people knew what they did, and when the Germans opened the door, the people wouldn't even move. They knew the Germans would shoot them.

There was hardly any water, maybe one pump, there were no sanitary facilities. There was only one apartment house. The other buildings were little shacks. They put gypsies into them. They said that the Jews could also stay there but the gypsies did not let the Jews in. Some Jews went in there and the gypsies beat them up. They put big signs on both of the gates saying "gefahr" – danger - because they didn't want foreign correspondents to know it was a ghetto. When journalists came, the Germans told them the people were in quarantine because there was an epidemic.¹³⁹

There must have been about seventeen or eighteen thousand people in the ghetto because there were a lot of people from other towns.¹⁴⁰ The Germans organized a Judenrat and a Jewish police force. The worst Jewish elements became the police - people who would take advantage of other people.¹⁴¹ People just sat behind those barbed

¹³⁹ This ruse was used frequently. In Warsaw the Judenrat had to put up signs saying "Danger: Epidemic Zone" at thirty-four street corners leading to the Jewish section in December 1939, before the ghetto was even created. Dawidowicz, War, 205.

¹⁴⁰ A marker in Siedlce says 17,000 Jews were killed at the Umschlagplatz or deported from it to Treblinka.

¹⁴¹ The Jewish police, the Ordnungsdienst (Order Service) enforced German orders and Judenrat orders. Although it was supposed to protect the Jewish community, it came to be regarded as an agent of oppression because it searched people entering and exiting the ghetto for contraband, arrested smugglers and confiscated the precious food and goods they brought into the ghetto, and rounded up recalcitrant residents for forced labor and deportation. Unlike the Judenräte, most people did not join the police out of a sense of communal responsibility; they joined voluntarily, in the interest of self-preservation. After a while, German terror led the better people to quit, leaving the more ruthless and hardhearted who did not

wires. There was absolutely nothing to do. There was nothing there. The Germans would come in and they would grab people for work, like you grab chickens from a coop. Everybody was in there - all they had to do was kick a door open and go in - there were ten people in every room. The crowding and the dirt made people sick. Typhus came.¹⁴² The dead were lying all over so it was no wonder. They didn't take the dead away. There was one little room where we could put the dead and they would come once a week and throw the bodies on a wagon and take them out. There were no funerals anymore. So, the Jews started organizing themselves. You know how Jews are - you bend and then you straighten out. You always think it's the last step. The doctors organized a little hospital, but there were no medicines. The only medication the Germans allowed was boric acid. You know what you can do with boric acid. They once used it to wash newborn infants' eyes but then they stopped because they found out that it left some children suffering from some disease. If you have cockroaches you can spread it, cockroaches don't like it. But there were no cockroaches there. We had this garden, so we planted some potatoes, a few carrots - it wasn't much - we were no great farmers. Winter came and it was very cold and there were no warm clothes and there was disease. There was very little food - if you got a couple of potatoes you boiled them with water and salt. Sometimes you could sell things on the black-market to farmers. They would come to the barbed wire at night and bring some food.

shy away from using force to exact compliance. Dawidowicz, War, 234-235.

¹⁴² Typhus becomes epidemic when people are crowded together, dirty, hungry, and cold. Typhus was the most prevalent ghetto disease, infecting 100,000 to 150,000 people in the Warsaw ghetto alone. However, it was not the major cause of death, ranking only eleventh or twelfth out of thirteen. In the Lodz ghetto, heart disease caused about thirty percent of all deaths. Dysentery, tuberculosis, hunger, and diseases of the digestive tract ranked next. Ibid., 214-215. Jewish efforts to fight epidemics were stymied by the Germans, who refused to provide medicine or additional food and used the epidemics as an excuse

Then the Germans decided that instead of catching Jews to work everyday, some places should have a steady crew. So they grabbed people and kept them at the work place. Some places were very bad, some places were not so bad, and some places gave the people a little to eat. It depended on the overseer. It was very personal. In some places they worked people without food until they dropped dead. Then they would put them in lorries, open the gate of the ghetto, drive in the lorries and turn them over and dump the people out. Dead or alive - it didn't matter. In the meantime, Wit got typhus. He was very sick. I don't know how he survived. There was no medicine or anything. I stayed with him the whole time and his teeth were clenched. We had to feed him water a little at a time. There was not much food but we pulled him through. After, his hair fell out. What saved us was the woman with the flour mill. She would bring a pound of flour and we would make something to eat. Mostly we would make soup. We cooked potatoes in water and then browned some flour and put the flour in the water so it turned the water brown. It wasn't a gourmet soup but it kept us alive. That's how life went on. We knew very little about what was going on outside. There was no electricity, no sanitation. We found out that if you put carbide into water and you light it, it burns and makes light. People came up with little iron pots and snuck in some carbide. The only problem was that you couldn't turn it off. After a while we learned how much carbide to use to get two hours of light.

In February 1941, Sarah and Benjamin decided to get married. The ghetto was begun in December but it wasn't closed yet. They were still working on the barbed wire

and some Jews still lived in town.¹⁴³ Benjamin's parents were among them. They lived on a street where there weren't many Jews and the Germans hadn't moved them into the ghetto. We decided to have the wedding in our house since the people in our house were friends, not strangers. It was a big effort to bring his parents into the ghetto. His father was a very formal man - he wanted to wear a top hat so we had to find a top hat. Benjamin bought a stuffed veal brisket on the black market. We cooked all night because we were afraid to cook during the day. A rabbi in the ghetto married them and they found a hole in one of the houses in the ghetto. Sarah immediately got pregnant and a few months later - in the summer - I got very sick. I got jaundice, my liver hurt, I couldn't move. The doctor came and said there was nothing to do because I needed sugar, glucose, and there was none. I was sick two, three months. I had terrible pains. I got so thin that the doctor found a stone which he could feel because I was so skinny. I remember one day I just hollered - I couldn't hold it anymore. Wit got so upset that he ran out of the ghetto. He knew a pharmacist on the other side and he got morphine from him. He risked his life because he just could not take seeing me in such pain. He brought back a whole box of morphine and they injected it just to calm me down. I don't know what happened to the stone. A while later, through somebody, they managed to get glucose, which was just a white powder, a sugar, and the doctor made a solution and they gave me a few injections. I finally got over this jaundice.

¹⁴³ Once again there seems to be a bit of confusion on chronology here, as the Siedlce ghetto was established in August 1941 and sealed October 1, 1941.

In the meantime everything was getting worse and worse by the minute. Typhus was raging and people were dying. The dead were lying all over the streets.¹⁴⁴ We were sitting in this house and waiting for the war to end. We learned of major events because they were reported in the German papers. Sometimes Germans said things. We didn't know a lot of details but we knew that things were going too well for them to be good for us. And so 1941 passed.

Sarah had her baby in early spring 1942, in the little Jewish hospital in the ghetto.¹⁴⁵ Nobody had babies there. We managed to scrape together a blanket and this and that. Benjamin really raised the child. He would change her and feed her, he didn't have anything else to do. We used to keep her at our house because there was fresh air in the garden. Then we started hearing that the Germans were taking people out of the ghettos and sending them away someplace. At first when the Germans took people to the camps they made the people on the trains write cards to their relatives. Then they would mail the cards to the relatives to make it seem the people were really living someplace else. They were very clever, but we already knew that there was something going on. Treblinka was very close to Siedlce.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Historians estimate that at least a half million Jews died in the ghettos of hunger, disease, harsh forced labor and random acts of violence. Dawidowicz, War, 397; Hilberg, Destruction, 189.

¹⁴⁵ Dorothea Halberstadt was born on March 3, 1942.

¹⁴⁶ Treblinka was one of the four death camps the Nazis built in Poland. At Treblinka, as at Chelmno, Belzec, and Sobibor, hardly any deportees were selected for forced labor; virtually all were exterminated on arrival. Gilbert, Second World War, 310. Treblinka was located in a pine forest about sixty miles northeast of Warsaw and thirty miles north of Siedlce. A. Sachar, Redemption, 32-33. It opened for business in July 1942 and most of the Jews of Warsaw and Siedlce were killed there. In total, approximately 750,000 Jews were killed at Treblinka, 250,000 in the seven weeks following July 22, 1942, the day the mass deportations from Warsaw began. Hilberg, Destruction, 239; Gilbert, Second World War, 343. To convey the impression that Treblinka was a real town, the Nazis built a fake railroad station at its entry, complete with signs and schedules showing train arrival and departure times. Davies, God's

At the same time the Germans were getting ready for the war with Russia.¹⁴⁷ They were building a lot of railroad tracks and highways. The Todt organization¹⁴⁸ - the company that was building the roads - was the worst; they would work people to death without food, and when they dropped dead or passed out, they would bring them back to the ghetto and dump them like garbage and grab a new bunch of people. There was also a bauzug, a train that built and repaired railroad tracks. The man who ran the bauzug was considered pretty decent for a German, so a lot of people tried to get work with him. A lot of young people worked there - several were doctors' children. Wit worked there too. At least they fed him something.

David and his brothers and his father were still in the ghetto. They did not get taken for work. David got caught a couple of times and was beaten but came back. My father was caught once, beaten up but not taken. The Germans usually came around in the mornings to catch people for the day's work. People knew so they would get up early and hide. There weren't many places to hide, but they would crawl up under the rafters and hide in attics. By ten o'clock the hunt was over so people would come down. You can imagine what kind of life it was. In the meantime the rumors were getting worse. Around the beginning of August two men from Warsaw managed to escape from

Playground, 2:460. They decorated the front wall of the gas chamber with a Star of David and a heavy curtain taken from a synagogue that said in Hebrew "This is the gate through which the righteous pass." Hilberg, Destruction, 229.

¹⁴⁷ This could not have been "the same time" as Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

¹⁴⁸ The Todt organization, established by Dr. Fritz Todt, German Minister of Armaments and War Production, was the major construction unit for the German Army. Edward L. Homze, Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 87. After Todt's death in a plane crash on February 8, 1942, Albert Speer, Hitler's architect, became head of the organization. Neither man "showed [any] scruples in exploiting the labour of captured people." Gilbert, Second World War, 299. Workers were generally underfed and overworked and many died of starvation and exhaustion.

Treblinka by hiding in a train car under a load of clothes. The Germans used to send clothes back to the rug factory. They landed in Siedlce and started telling their stories. Nobody believed them. There is something in every person - a self-defense mechanism, a will to live or whatever - that keeps you from accepting some things. They said, "Look, we are telling you the truth," but nobody believed them.¹⁴⁹ Later they got to Warsaw and were involved in the Warsaw uprising.¹⁵⁰ Nobody believed them, although people repeated the story. If somebody believed it, people called him an alarmist.

One Friday, the last Friday in August,¹⁵¹ I wanted to buy some cottage cheese. I went to a little store where they used to get cottage cheese from farmers, and there were a lot of people there repeating the story. Then one man said, "We are next." He worked with some Germans unloading trains and he had just seen a whole trainload of S.S. men come in. When those special commandos came in, you knew that something was going

¹⁴⁹ There are numerous stories of escapees from death camps returning to tell people what they saw and encountering only disbelief. Throughout the spring of 1942 reports of mass shootings and gassings seeped into Warsaw, but the Jews could not comprehend the reality of mass murder even in the face of the suffering they were enduring at Nazi hands. Morally, the systematic mass murder of millions of innocent people was totally unacceptable. From a rational standpoint, the killing of skilled workers who could help the German war economy seemed completely senseless. Dawidowicz, War, 349. What the Jews did not and could not know was that the Nazis were willing to sacrifice military needs to achieve the Final Solution. The Jews were not alone in their incredulity; reports on the death camps met with disbelief all over Europe. *Idem*, 350.

¹⁵⁰ The major Warsaw ghetto revolt began on April 19, 1943. A brief four-day revolt began on January 18, 1943, when the Germans came to the ghetto to resume deportations; one thousand Jews were killed in the fighting, but the resistance was enough to make the Germans withdraw. Martin Gilbert, Atlas of the Holocaust (New York: Pergamon, 1988), 158.

On April 19, 1943, the Germans decided to try again. They returned with tanks and artillery but were met by gunfire. Twelve hundred Jews with seventeen rifles fought 2100 German troops equipped with machine guns, howitzers and 1358 rifles. Gilbert, Second World War, 421. The Germans began burning down houses and smoking out people who were hiding in sewers or bunkers. On May 8, 1943, they reached the headquarters of the Jewish underground and killed Mordecai Anielewicz, the underground leader, and one hundred of his fighters. Thus ended the uprising. During the three weeks, more than 56,000 Jews were burned, shot or deported to Treblinka. Gilbert, Atlas, 158.

¹⁵¹ This must have been Friday, August 21, actually the next to last Friday in August, as the major deportation of Siedlce Jews to Treblinka took place on August 22, 1942.

to happen.¹⁵² He said, "I am telling you, tonight we are going to be finished off. Because I saw them". I went home and told the others what I heard. They had heard the same thing from somebody else. But where was there to go? There was no place to go. And in the middle of the night the S.S. surrounded the ghetto. They surrounded the whole ghetto. They drove around in a truck and they ordered everybody - men, women, children - to be at the Umschlagplatz by ten in the morning. They have a memorial there now. That was the square where they killed everybody. People went. They went with all kinds of theories. Some said that they would pick out the people they wanted for work and send the rest home. People told you to take your pass if you worked someplace because they would check it. At first, my father didn't want to go; then he decided since he had a pass that said he worked for the military he would go.¹⁵³ My uncle said he had enough, he was going, he didn't want to live anymore. Later people told me that he marched all the way, holding his two boys - one was fourteen, one was eleven or twelve - by the hands. He just said, enough is enough. Maybe a lot of people felt that way. Wit went, my father went, my mother didn't go. My aunt didn't go. David didn't go. I didn't go.

There was a hole under the house, a big hole where they were going to put in sewers. We crawled into this hole. My aunt, my mother, myself and the dentist's wife.

¹⁵² Special commandos were usually brought in to assist with major deportations. They circled the ghetto and rounded up the Jews, making sure they got to the loading site.

¹⁵³ Ghetto Jews considered work passes to be life insurance. Those who obtained passes saying they were skilled workers or necessary to the war economy felt protected from seizure and deportation. Operating on logic and reason the Jews believed that the Nazis would spare them if they worked hard and contributed to the war effort. The Nazis encouraged this belief, using it effectively for their own purposes. The illusion kept the ghetto populace from panicking and revolting and allowed the Nazis to exploit their labor. However, war needs were often sacrificed to the extermination effort, and requests by military or civilian officials to spare certain skilled workers were frequently rejected.

David too. The dentist went. More men went than women. They thought that they would pick them for work. We stayed there in the hole under the house. We didn't know what was happening. We didn't know anything. We just heard commotion, noise, sporadic shooting, like thunder. We didn't know what was going on. It took a long time. It must have been the whole day. At one point my mother said that maybe we should move the bricks and look out and see what was going on. There was a spot in the wall where the bricks were loose. Across the yard was a shack where wood or coal used to be stored. A Jewish family lived there. He was a shoemaker. We took the bricks out and I looked out just at the moment the Germans shot this poor shoemaker. They were going from house to house looking for people and he was there. He didn't go to the Umschlagplatz and he didn't hide. I don't know where his wife and children were. I could see his head come off. That was enough.

We stayed under the house a long time. We stayed all night, stayed all day the next day. We didn't know what to do. We didn't know if there was a world to come out to. The hole was a long tunnel. I was on one end - that's why I could look out the hole. My mother and my aunt and the dentist's wife were in the middle. David got in last so he was at the other end; if the Germans looked in he would be the first they would see. About the second night, I think, somebody knocked on the wall. It was Benjamin's youngest brother, Samuel. He was in the Jewish police force. He called David by name. He told him it was safe to come out, so David went out. He told me, don't worry, whatever it is, if I'm alive I will come and tell you what is going on. I don't know how much time passed, but it must have been toward morning when there was another knock and David told me to come out. He brought me a man's suit to wear. The Germans

needed some men to collect the dead and put them on wagons so they could be pulled out. No women were allowed. We went to pick up the dead. There were corpses lying all over the place, all over the street. We worked a couple of hours until the wagon was full. Then he said he had a place for me to hide. It was an attic in the little ghetto. The gypsies were gone. He said to go up in this attic and wait. There were some other women hiding there. He would go and get my mother and aunt out. So I went to the attic.

There were twenty, thirty women sitting there. Among them was a young woman with a baby. The baby started crying. Everybody got upset that the Germans would hear the crying, that they would come up and kill us all. What to do with the baby? He was crying again. He was hungry or scared, who knows? It was a tiny baby. I don't know how, but they smothered it. Later I found out that the Germans went to the Jewish hospital and shot everybody there. Benjamin had put his baby in the hospital thinking maybe the Germans would not do anything in the hospital, but they came in and shot everybody, including the baby. There were a lot of nurses there and they shot them too. One of them was Wit's girlfriend Ella Salzman. They went together for several years. The bauzug boss would let his workers go on Fridays so they could stay home over the weekend, so Wit was home. Someone told him what was happening at the hospital and he ran over there. When he arrived he saw them putting her body on the wagon with the dead. She had an older sister who was very active in the Socialist party. That sister was raped and killed.

We were hiding in this attic and we didn't know what to do. There was no bathroom, it was hot. We all went in a corner. When we looked down through the holes in the roof we saw men gathering in the yard below, coming and going. David didn't

come up, I didn't know what was going on. Some other women came up but my mother didn't and my aunt didn't. I didn't know what was happening. I looked out again and saw Dinah's father get shot.¹⁵⁴ He was a little old man and they shot him. At that moment I thought that maybe I should go down too. The attic was smelly and hot and I thought that since they were going to kill us all anyway it might be better to be in the fresh air than be shot in the attic. I was going to go down - I felt - what the hell - I would rather be shot like him in the sunshine than there in the filthy attic. It was so filthy, there was no toilet, everybody was doing things on the floor. Then David came up and I asked him who is alive and who is dead. He said nobody is left, everybody is dead, except you and me and the people you see here. He told me that the Germans brought a lot of food to the Umschlagplatz. They made the people set up tables with food and then the Germans sat there with shotguns and ate while the fifteen thousand Jews sat squatting on the ground. They made them squat and then they shot them.

At the Umschlagplatz the Germans picked about fifteen hundred young men to work.¹⁵⁵ Wit was one of them. A lot of people they killed but mostly they didn't shoot to kill, they shot to wound. The people died in the heat. With no food and no water and the blood not being staunched, people just died from loss of blood or from sunstroke. Those who survived they put on trains and sent to Treblinka. Later, I learned that David's father and one brother got shot there. The other brothers went to Treblinka. My father went to Treblinka. My uncle and his two boys went to Treblinka. I tried to find out what

¹⁵⁴ Dinah was a friend of Ida and David.

¹⁵⁵ The Germans selected five hundred Jews to stay in the ghetto but fifteen hundred more stayed there illegally. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Siedlce."

happened to my mother and I was told that she left the hole under the house with my aunt Sarah. I don't know why but she did not wait for anybody to come. She just left the hole and as she left she was shot. Benjamin's brother Samuel, the policeman, told me that he found them both - my mother and my aunt. He didn't tell me at that time - it took many many years. So I never saw them again after I left the hole - that was it, and that was the end of the ghetto.

I don't know why we always thought that each calamity was the worst - that if we just survived this calamity, things would get better. Every time another blow fell, we still believed. We were very flexible - we must have had a will to live, to survive. I felt ready to die but not ready to die by my own hand. You were surrounded with so much death you really didn't even think about it. There were corpses lying all over the place because nobody collected them and it was summer and it was awful. Twenty of us lived in an upstairs room, and a corpse lay on the steps for ten days and every time you went up you had to step over it. It sounds horrible, but you got used to it. Maybe a certain part of your mind goes dead, or maybe you get hardened. We were in touch with death all the time. Besides killing people, the Germans played cruel games. Sometimes it's more merciful to kill a person than to play with him. They would always create illusions. They'd say, okay, this is the last time - from now on, so and so. Like with the work passes. They knew that they were going to kill everybody but they made people believe that if they made themselves useful the Germans would not kill them and then the Germans killed them anyway.

We women sat in this attic about two days and a night. I still did not know what had happened to my father and Wit. The city commissar - his name was Fabisch - knew

that there were some women survivors. He wanted the big ghetto cleaned out, the houses emptied, so he said he would give the women an amnesty if they went to the big ghetto and cleaned it. There were dead bodies lying in the rooms and there was a lot of stuff still there - people would sew gold and money into clothes to save their lives. All this had to be cleaned out - food and everything. So we all left this attic. A lot of women who were hiding in holes started coming out when they heard about the amnesty offer. Sometimes a husband or brother or father would tell the woman to come out because he thought she'd be safe if she agreed to clean the ghetto.

There must have been seventy-five or one hundred women and the first day they picked thirty. I wasn't picked. There were some prominent women in this group. There was a Mrs. Landau whose husband was a well-known lawyer. The women worked all day and when they were finished, the Germans put them in a truck, took them out to the cemetery and shot them - after Fabisch had assured their safety. Fabisch announced that they were shot because they stole food from the ghetto.

The next day Fabisch announced he wanted another thirty women but he promised that they would come back if they didn't steal. Since no women came forward to volunteer, they grabbed thirty women. They searched them when they went into the ghetto and they searched them when they came out, but they did come back. The third day he wanted another thirty women. This time he said that if the women found anything edible, they could take it. I went to the big ghetto twice, but I must have gone there about the fifth or sixth day. Eventually everybody went. How can I describe rooms where twenty people lived in a room, where people were killed and there was blood all over and corpses lying? People did find some things sewed in the clothes but they were not too

eager to find things just to give them to the Germans. You were supposed to put everything on shmattes.¹⁵⁶ They sent them to a factory to make rugs. We made bundles from what we found and left the rooms empty of everything but the furniture. Sometimes you would find some potatoes but you didn't find much.

In the meantime I found out that Wit was alive. I told David that I wanted to see him. David found him but Wit didn't want to see me. He felt very guilty about letting my father go. He thought he should have gone with him. Finally, we got together and he was very, very upset. He said that when they were at the Umschlagplatz, some people tried to buy themselves out with money. He said he had a suitcase full of money to pay for our father, but the Germans wouldn't take it. There were some people there who had so much money - bankers and all - that when they were chosen to go to Treblinka they threw the money to other people so they could save themselves. Somebody he knew was sitting there and passed him a whole suitcase of money, but he couldn't save our father. At that time our father was still relatively young, but those few years had aged him tremendously. He had grown gray and he really looked old. The Germans wouldn't take people that age for work so they separated them. My father went to Treblinka, and Wit went back to the bauzug to work.

So we stayed in the little ghetto, the one where the gypsies used to live. There was really nothing there, and the gypsies didn't leave it in the cleanest condition. There were about two thousand people in the little ghetto, but the number was dwindling. On Saturday there were more because the Germans would bring people in from their

¹⁵⁶ "Shmatte" is the Yiddish word for rag or piece of cloth. It derives from the Polish word "szmata." It can also mean something cheap or shoddy. Rosten, *Joys*, 352.

workplaces for the weekend. But during the week there were very few. There were mostly people who couldn't move, and then the Todt organization would bring in people on lorries who worked for them three, four days with beatings and no food. They would turn the lorries over and dump the people in the middle of the street. Some of them would crawl out and some of them would just lie in the street and wait to die. You tried to help as best you could - sometimes you gave them a little bread, sometimes water. Sometimes you just pushed them out of the way so they wouldn't lie in the open and get shot.

People looked for places to work for the Germans to save their lives. There was work for those who could do it. We tried to keep it organized -that was really the funny thing. A bunch of corpses trying to keep things organized. There were all kinds of German bulletins and German demands. Sometimes you went to the barbed wires to buy a couple of potatoes. Poles would bring potatoes to the wires. Rena's family, the Levines, had a flour mill. The Germans took it over and they needed people to load and unload the trains. The workers would live there - they had a barrack; that was usually better, the living conditions at least. So the Levines picked all their family, whoever was left, and people they knew and David went too. Benjamin went to another place where they needed carpenters. His family was in the lumber business so he knew about wood. His parents had disappeared. Sarah was hidden with Poles - she wasn't in the little ghetto.

On our second wedding anniversary, September 6, 1942, while I was in the little ghetto and David was at the flour mill, a friend of David's who was a customer of the Yomtovs got us both out and brought us to his house, where his wife cooked us a chicken dinner. This was very courageous because he lived across the street from the Gestapo headquarters. He used to buy from David and they became friendly - they were about the

same age.¹⁵⁷ Before the war when we used to visit Sala Alberg out of town we would stop at his store and load up with Polish kielbasa.¹⁵⁸ He had a little store where he sold beer and other things, and the Gestapo would drink there and he would listen to what they said. He was very active in the Polish underground. One of his brothers was a captain of a Polish U-boat that ran away and fought under the English. It flew the Polish flag but it was under the English command. I think it was called the Wulf.¹⁵⁹

After we cleaned out the big ghetto people started saying that the women were going to be executed because they didn't need them anymore. So David got very worried. He decided to see if I could leave the ghetto and hide someplace outside. We found out that there was a Pole who, for a certain amount of money, would take women out of the ghetto to a pre-arranged hiding place. He would make believe it was a date. David asked the couple who cooked us our anniversary dinner if they would keep me a few days until he found me a hiding place and they agreed. One evening this young Pole came to get me. He brought lipstick and a silk handkerchief, and he waited at a place where the barbed wire was a little loose. I held the wires out and went between them, and he walked with me, holding me by the arm like a date, to a house in the country. The people there were very nice to me. They had chickens and eggs. They fed me, it was like a rest. They were very nice, except the woman's old father was a nervous wreck while I was there. He was very worried that they would get caught. These were the people who had the store, who were in the underground. One day the man mentioned that he knew

¹⁵⁷ This friend's name was Siekierzynski.

¹⁵⁸ Sala Alberg was a friend of David and Ida.

¹⁵⁹ I could not get any information on this boat.

somebody who had a big estate in the country. He thought maybe he could bring me there and I could work there like a field hand, until this whole thing was over, but when he went to see the man this man said he already had a few Jews hidden and he was afraid to take more.

At that time we heard that the German army needed straw shoes because they were getting ready to march into Russia.¹⁶⁰ In the prison factory, we made straw shoes. You put them over your boots so your feet wouldn't freeze. It wasn't a fancy shoe, it was a big, heavy boot. Somebody in the little ghetto had the idea that maybe the women could make those straw shoes for the German army, and maybe they would let us live. They started looking for someone who knew how to make them, and they remembered that I knew how to do it. I knew because I made the first samples. Besides the prison factory my father had an outside factory with some partners. The outside factory was given to a German athlete from the Olympics, a big sportsman. He had some Jews working there at one time. So, it was decided without me that I should go talk to him and see if he would arrange to set up this operation. One night these friends of David's, this couple who kept me, brought me to David, to the flour mill. I stayed there all night and in the morning I started marching to this factory. I went by myself, with no arm band, and I had to pass the street where we used to live. When I passed, people looked out and saw me and turned away. They knew me, but no one spoke to me. The janitor of our house came by, gave me a look and turned away. I made it safely to the factory, and I went in. There was a little room before the office. The German came in, looked at me,

¹⁶⁰ When this incident took place, the Germans were already fighting in Russia, as they invaded in June 1941, a year before the liquidation of the Siedlce ghetto. The terrible battle for Stalingrad would have been going on in fall and winter 1942.

and immediately asked where was my armband. I didn't have one. He called somebody in and told him to get me an armband. We started talking. He said he would see what he could do. Then he said I had to go back. He asked where I came from. I said I was outside the ghetto. He said to go back into the ghetto, and then he said, "To make sure that you get there safely and nobody harms you on the way, I'll send somebody with you." He called in another German and told him to walk with me to the ghetto, which he did. But the plan fell through.

About two weeks later in September the Germans needed women to sort glass at a glass factory outside Siedlce where bottles were made. They formed another group and because they were all people I knew I joined them. We lived in a little hut and worked in this factory sorting glass. There were about ten of us - all women and one man. Compared to the room in the little ghetto, it was really luxury because it wasn't so dirty and you could get a little food. So, Wit was in the bauzug, David was at the flour mill and I was in this glass factory. I didn't know where Sarah was but Benjamin was in the carpentry shop. Of course you never knew if the person would still be there the next day.

Not far from this glass factory were three large apartment buildings in which the workers at the glass factory lived. The union had built them and they were very plain. One day we heard a rumor that the Germans had decided that the Jews had suffered enough - they planted those rumors - and those who now survived in the little ghetto were going to be brought out there to those three houses to live so that they would be out of the city and nobody would see them. The houses would not even be surrounded with wire. They would be open and the Jews could stay there until the war was over. We looked out the windows of our hut and we could see those houses and we saw that they had been

emptied. One Friday the Germans went into the little ghetto and told everybody to pack up - they were bringing them to those houses.¹⁶¹ They were so sadistic - so perfidious - they even supplied horse-drawn wagons for the people who couldn't walk because the houses were about three miles out of town. This whole sorry procession - the sick and the broken and the old - went through the whole city out to those houses. The people were so happy because they were out in the country and they thought they might have a little better food.

That Friday night I went to the buildings to see who was there. I didn't know if they had brought David in. The scene was indescribable. The people were having a Shabbat service - they were praying and singing - it was dark and a candle was flickering and casting shadows on the walls. I didn't find David there, so I went back to the hut. Around eleven at night we heard a lot of commotion. In the middle of the night the S.S. surrounded those three buildings. When dawn came we looked out. The empty fields all around were covered with snow and we could see the Germans bringing in groups of Jews. We heard shots and we saw people jumping out third floor windows falling in the snow, making red spots in the snow. We saw people trying to run away and Germans shooting them in the snow. We saw the dead bodies. And we saw groups of people coming in so we figured that the Germans were bringing in the people from the other work places. I looked to see if I saw a group of seven people. I didn't see it, but that didn't mean they weren't there - I didn't know. We didn't know if they were going to come for us, if they knew about us. We left the hut and hid in the barn. We were afraid

¹⁶¹ The small ghetto was evacuated on Wednesday, November 25, 1942, and its two thousand Jews sent to Gesiborki, where all the survivors from the province were concentrated. Many were killed there; those who weren't were sent to Treblinka. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Siedlce."

that maybe the farmer would talk, but nobody came. We hid in the barn and we looked out through holes and we saw this killing and shooting all day Saturday.¹⁶² They always did everything either on a holiday or on a Saturday - they never did it in the middle of the week. I know that Yom Kippur I was already in the little ghetto - I remember somebody said "Today is Yom Kippur. You don't even have to pray for atonement."¹⁶³

Another dawn came and there were dead bodies everywhere. Those who were still alive the Germans were leading out of the houses to a train siding by the glass factory. At that time there were already foreign correspondents swarming all over Poland because it was known that something was happening. The Germans tried to cover up - that's why they put the epidemic sign on the ghetto. If there was a foreigner who saw those people marching, the Germans probably told him that they were going to settle them out of town. Later I heard that a lot of foreign papers had all the stories but they weren't the true stories. Then they put the people in the trains and sent them off. So, once again I didn't know whom I had or whom I didn't have. I didn't know anything. I didn't know where David or Wit were. I didn't know where Sarah was. Benjamin hid her. We never knew. He never said.

It was strange but at that time my mind worked real well. I was always in a state where I accepted what happened and then thought of the next step. I never thought that maybe there was not going to be a next step. They killed all those people - so what do I do next? I remembered that there was a Pole who spoke Yiddish very well who used to come to the ghetto to sell things. We knew him and he said if anything ever happens you

¹⁶² Saturday would have been November 28.

¹⁶³ In 1942 Yom Kippur fell on September 21.

can come to my house and I'll hide you. I knew where he lived - it was a little out of town - and I decided to go to his house. When I came to the hut by the glass factory I still had some nightgowns my aunt from Lodz had sent. I still had them because I didn't consider wearing them. I figured I would use them like money. By this time I knew that Papuski would not give us anything. People went to him and he refused to help. The farmer in whose barn we hid had a young son, and I told the son that I wanted him to come with me to the place where this Pole lived. I told him I'd give him all this fancy stuff if he went with me. So he went.

We started out at dawn. I could have gone by myself - I knew the way - but I wanted him to take me through the fields because in the fields you didn't meet so many Germans. We went through cemeteries, through fields, the snow was up to our knees. Finally, I got to the Pole's house. He not only didn't hide me, he threw me out. He said there were still some Jews at the kissgrube - why didn't I go stay with them? A kissgrube is a place where they dig gravel. The kissgrube was not far from his place, but there were Germans around it. Also you could be seen walking. You couldn't hide. There were no bushes - everything was bare. The farmer's son had gone back to his house, so I couldn't go back with him. I didn't have anything else to do, so I headed to the kissgrube. Before I got there, the Germans caught me. They caught another woman too. It was the beginning of December - the first of December exactly. Later we found out that the Germans had announced that Siedlce would be Judenfrei by December first. I always say it's my second birthday.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ On July 19, 1942, two days after a visit to Auschwitz, Heinrich Hemmler, head of the S.S., ordered all General Government Poland to be totally cleansed of Jews - "Judenfrei" - by December 31, 1942. The mass deportations from Warsaw began three days later. Gilbert, Second World War, 343.

In the meantime the people in the kissgrube noticed what was going on. One of the men working there was a good friend of my parents. I knew him very well too. This man had three children. He didn't want any more but his wife got pregnant and he went around complaining. It was shortly after my brother died, so my father said, "Don't worry, I will buy the baby from you." He said, "For fifty dollars you can have it." My father agreed. When the baby was born, it was a boy and they named him Samuel. The man didn't want to give him up, he said it was a joke. My father said "It was not a joke. I gave you the money, and the baby is mine and we want the baby." Since we lived nearby, this little boy grew up in both homes. When he was in our house he was considered ours and in their house he was considered theirs. He was a very handsome little boy - my father and mother were crazy about him. We all liked him but the bigger he got, the more this father saw that he made a bad deal. The boy didn't really know exactly what was going on but he saw that when he came to our house he was treated well so he would spend a lot of time there. Of course he died at the Umschlagplatz - he was ten or eleven years old.

This man - the boy's father - went up to one of the Germans and said "You have those two women", and the German said, "Yes, they're going to be shot." Then they shot the other woman. Then this man said to the German, "Look, she's not going to run away. I have some schnapps, so why don't you have a drink with me?" He didn't tell him that he knew me. He got the German in there and they drank. To me he said, "Look, when he is drinking, you run. I can't help you. I think we will live here another day and they will come for us too. All I can tell you is run, I don't know where. I can't give you anything,

I just took this German away, so run. I don't care because they will kill us anyway." I didn't know what to do, I didn't know where to go, but I figured what did I have to lose. I would be shot here, I would be shot there. The Germans did kill them the next day - they came and executed the whole group.

I started walking through the fields and then I sat down in some forest. I sat and I didn't know what to do. Then I saw railroad tracks and I started walking again. On the railroad tracks they had little cabins where a man used to sit - they looked like a cage on top of a ladder. I saw one and I figured no one would find me up there. So I went up and sat there until it got dark. It gets dark very early in the winter in Poland - about three o'clock. I sat there all day and then I remembered something that Benjamin's sister told me about the Polish house where she hid when the large ghetto still existed. This sister lived in Warsaw and came to Siedlce to visit and then couldn't return to Warsaw. She told me she was sitting on the third floor looking out at the old cemetery. I thought I knew where the house was. I was familiar with it because it stood next to the Jewish orphanage where my mother worked. The whole street had burned down, but one house was left standing. It had to be this house because the old cemetery was across the street.

I decided when it got dark to walk to town and go to this house. If I got caught on the way I got caught. I didn't wear the arm band. I wore a gray tweed coat and I started walking. I got to town and I got to Sientowicz Street and I got to this house and I started knocking on the door. Somebody on the first floor yelled "Who is it?" and I said, "I want to see the people on the third floor." That was really risky because I didn't know the

people on the first floor. If the Germans caught you hiding a Jew they executed you.¹⁶⁵ One of Rena's aunts had some good Polish friends who hid her and her husband and then somebody denounced them. The Germans took all four out - the friend and her husband and the aunt and her husband - and shot them all. So the Polish people were also playing with fire. Obviously the people on the first floor went upstairs and a woman whom I didn't know at all came down. She snapped at me quietly - "What are you doing here?" She saw who I was and I said, "Look, I am Benjamin Halberstadt's sister-in-law and I want you to let me in - I have to come in." She was afraid to talk - she whispered "Okay, come up, come up." I went up and she let me in the kitchen and her husband got very angry. Later I learned that she had already hidden a Jewish girl in one of the rooms. She had two bedrooms and she was afraid to have more people. There was no plumbing, so you had to do everything in the house. If there were two extra people and you suddenly started carrying down a lot of pots, people wondered.

I started asking her questions and she said she knew where Benjamin was, she was in touch with him. She had some connection with the Halberstadts, I don't know exactly what it was. She said she didn't know about David or anyone else. I told her I had to get in touch with Benjamin. She said Benjamin was hiding, but if I wrote a note she would deliver it to him. So I wrote a note and she delivered it. Benjamin said if I wanted I could come see him. He was still in the carpenter shop. The shop was near the house where I grew up. It wasn't really a shop, it was sort of a co-op which did work for the farmers. They had a big yard there and a lot of farmers would drive in with horses

¹⁶⁵ On October 15, 1941, Governor General Frank issued a decree ordering the death sentence for any Christian Pole who knowingly helped a Jew hide or leave the ghetto. Tec, When Light, 22.

and buggies to pick up lumber. They had machinery, plows, things like this. I walked through the city where I grew up, where everybody knew me, and I figured whatever happens, happens. The moment I got close to this place, a door opened and someone grabbed me and pulled me into a room. It was an old man. I looked at him and he asked, "What are you doing here?" I don't remember what I said. He just looked at me, "I work here at that desk by the window. I've known you all your life. I saw you pass every day going to and from school." I didn't know him. I told him I wanted to see Benjamin. He said, "Ok, you want to see the Jew. Wait here and don't move." He closed the door and got Benjamin. Benjamin told me he didn't know where David was but he thought that he was still at the flour mill. He told me to go there and ask for the old watchman because the watchman was a nice man who sometimes brought food to the people who worked there. Then he left. So I walked back to this woman's house, maybe five blocks, and I told her that later I wanted to go to the flour mill. I couldn't go then because the mill was guarded by Germans, because it made flour for their army. But it closed at five or six o'clock and then the Germans left. I told the woman I had to go there to see this man and find out what happened to my husband. She was not very happy about the idea, but she went with me. I still didn't see the girl hidden in the other room.

When it got dark we went to the mill. The old night watchman was there, and I asked him about David. He said they were all still there. Later David told me that when the Germans started picking up the people, this old man came into the room where they were and said, "Come on, men, I'm going to hide you. I have a place. I don't want to have on my conscience that I let people get killed. I can't do very much but I will hide you and we'll see what happens." At the mill they had some big scales - the kind that a

car or a wagon drives over to be weighed. Underneath the platform was a big empty space where the mechanism was located. There was an opening to get in if you had to fix it. He put them all in that space under the scale. He told them all to stay there and for two days they all lay on the ground while wagons drove over this scale. They didn't get hurt because the scale itself was like a platform and the mechanism was underneath. At night he would give them some bread and water or something, but during the day this scale operated and they all lay there.

All the big "aktionen" were done by special commandos from out of town. They would come into town and do the main "aktion".¹⁶⁶ Once they had finished, once they felt that they had cleaned up a city, they moved to the next one. Then the local Gestapo would take over. They would go in small groups with trucks to pick people up. If they arrived somewhere and the Jews weren't there, they probably thought that somebody else had picked them up. They probably checked over the place pretty well, but they didn't look under the scales. If they had looked they would have found them. It was just luck. Sometimes people stayed in a cellar and the Germans never opened the door to look in. Others stayed in cellars and were found because the Germans saw the cellar and opened the door and looked in. They were especially trained - they were like animals. They walked around with big revolvers and they shot to kill. When they went to pick Jews up, they had lists, so they knew where people were, but if the Jews weren't there, they just figured they would catch them on the road. They were so sure they would catch them. They walked the streets, the fields, and mostly they caught individuals. They caught a lot

¹⁶⁶ "Aktion" is one of euphemisms or indeterminate terms the Germans used instead of saying "killing" or "murder." Other examples are *Aussiedlung* (resettlement) and *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment). Levin, *Holocaust*, 262. An "aktion" usually involved rounding up and killing Jews.

of people - I later found out that they killed about two hundred people on the streets. Some people ran, but some didn't - some just gave up and turned themselves in and said "Look, shoot me, I can't run anymore."

David came out and he began crying. You can imagine what shape he was in. I told him the Germans had finished everybody off except me. He asked where I was hiding. I said I was hiding with this woman but she wanted me to leave. I had no money, I didn't have anything. I had no place to go. I told him about the kissgrube. He said, "Take me out of here." I said "Where am I going to take you? I don't have any place to take you. I don't have any place to take myself." He was crying like a baby, so I took him with me. The woman got very angry. She said she's not going to do this, she's not going to do that. I said, "Look, I don't know what's going to happen, but right now we are going back to your house. I can't live in here". And this old watchman said "Look, they've been here two days. How long can they stay? If the scale goes out of whack and the man goes in to fix it, he'll find them there. They all have to go." I don't know what happened to the others. I still don't know. I think one of them survived. So David left with me, and we went to her house. Her husband was furious. I didn't know what to do. She said that David could only stay if he stayed in bed. She would straighten up the bed and put the bedcovers over so no one would know someone was there. I started thinking of ways to get out. At that time the Germans were grabbing a lot of Poles for forced labor because they had run out of Jews.¹⁶⁷ They would surround a church on Sunday and

¹⁶⁷ Actually, German labor shortages led German leaders to look to Poland for workers very early in the war. Some Nazi leaders saw Poland as "an enormous...labor camp," while others disapproved of the use of foreign labor because they feared the foreigners would sully the purity of the master race. Ulrich Herbert, Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich, trans. William Templer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 108. The pragmatists must have won

take all the young people. They also took people from the villages. When I was in the glass factory I heard that some of these Polish villagers didn't mind it so much in Germany because they worked in factories and it wasn't so terrible. They didn't live so well in Poland. Also, people said that if you went voluntarily, the Germans gave you better conditions. Some Poles who were very, very poor would go to the Arbeitsamt, the Labor Office, and volunteer for work in Germany, so they could pick what they wanted to do.

When we were still in the little ghetto, before we were all separated, Wit was already actively involved in the underground. He had a lot of Polish friends. He had gotten Polish papers for himself, and he was pushing the idea of passing as Poles. It was easy for him. It was easy for me. We were brought up with Catholics, we knew the prayers, the beliefs. But I opposed it on account of David. With his dark hair, there was no way he could pass for a Pole. He looked so Jewish, and his manner was so Jewish, it was just impossible. It was like he had Jew written on his face.¹⁶⁸ But Wit kept insisting. You could buy a passport, so he had a passport, he had good papers from a man who had really lived and died, and he got me a passport. I also had a girlfriend who worked in the

because Germany set up labor recruitment offices in Poland immediately after the invasion. Initially some Poles volunteered, some because they needed work, unemployment being high in Poland, some because they had previously worked in Germany as seasonal agricultural laborers. However, as reports came back of living and working conditions in Germany, the number of volunteers declined. By mid-April 1940, only 210,000 Poles had gone to Germany, 790,000 fewer than the one million requested by German officials in January 1940. The Nazis then resorted to quotas, forcible seizures and other coercive measures to get the workers they needed. Idem, 81-82. By August 1944, there were 1.7 million Poles working in the Greater Reich. Idem, 1.

¹⁶⁸ To Poles the stereotypical Jew had dark eyes, dark curly hair, a beard and a big nose. Eva Fogelman, Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 139; Tec, When Light, 35. In addition to these physical traits, many Jews had distinctive cultural and behavioral traits which made them susceptible to detection. Many spoke Yiddish rather than Jewish; even those who spoke Polish often had Yiddish accents or inflections. Their expressions and gestures were also distinctive. One writer has estimated that eighty percent of the Jews could be recognized by Poles. Heller, Edge, 69.

city hall, and Wit got in touch with her, and she said that she would make a passport for me, and when she sent passports to the city commissioner to be signed she would put it with the others. He signed twenty or thirty, and he didn't look at every one, so he would sign it. So I wound up with two passports in the little ghetto, which was very lucky for me later. Wit said that a lot of young people were getting passports and were going to pass as Poles and go to Germany. They figured that in Germany they would not look for you. The work camps had twenty or thirty thousand people, so you could vanish. Wit knew about them because many of the underground leaders who were being hunted by the Gestapo went to Germany and disappeared in those camps. The Gestapo couldn't find them there. Poland became a place where you were easy to find, but over in Germany you could hide. Wit told me he thought if he didn't get caught, he would go too. They had already caught and hanged a couple of his friends. We had a friend, Chaim, whose younger brother was in the underground. He was a big, tall fellow. They caught him and two Poles and hanged all three of them in the middle of a field.

Wit was still working on the *bauzug* but the situation there was getting tight. I don't remember how I heard, but it must have been through this woman in whose house I was hiding. I was sending her all over the place for news, and she was so scared, she really only went because she wanted to get rid of us. I was almost blackmailing her. One night she took me to a photographer to make pictures for a passport. She knew a photographer who was also in the underground, and when it was dark she took me to him, and he took photographs, and in the morning he delivered them. So I had photographs for the passport for myself, but I didn't have photographs for David and I didn't have any contact now with anybody who sold passports, and I didn't have the money to buy a

passport. At that time you needed about fifteen hundred zlotys to buy a passport. And with his looks there was no way in the world he could pass for Polish. He was skinny and he looked Jewish. In Poland the Germans even caught Poles who looked like Jews, and they had to identify themselves. But this woman was so desperate to get rid of us that she offered to get David a baptismal certificate. It wasn't a passport, but at least it was a piece of paper. She knew a priest who would give her a certificate if I gave her two zlotys and fifty cents. So she got this certificate. The only problem was that the man was about twenty years younger than David. He was in his twenties and David was almost forty and partially bald.

In the meantime Wit said he had to get out too. I recalled the Arbeitsamt, the labor office. They recruited people to work in Germany, and when the Germans caught people, they brought them to the Arbeitsamt and assembled the transports there. We knew that in Warsaw there was a central office where all the transports gathered and from there they shipped the people to Germany. So I had to get David into a transport, which was not easy because the Poles on the transport would recognize him. Then I remembered that a man who worked in the Arbeitsamt lived near our old house. So late one afternoon I went to see him. Whenever I went out, I left everything with David, the passports, papers, because you never knew if you were going to come back. If I had a few zlotys I would leave them too. You never took anything with you. So I went to see this man. I knocked on his door, and when he opened it, he turned white. I said, "Look, I have my husband hidden and my brother, and I don't have any money, but I want you to put them both on a transport and take them both to Germany." He started hollering and his wife came out, and he yelled, "What are you thinking? How can I do this? Get out of

here - I don't want anybody to see you here." My only weapons were chutzpah and blackmail. I didn't have any money. I didn't have anything but that, so I said, "Look, I am not going and if people hear it's fine with me. I have nothing to lose because they may shoot me today or tomorrow, but you have a family, you have a lot to lose, so either you help me or we all go together." So he calmed down, because really, that was the only choice he had. He said to me, "Look, I can't put David in a transport. I really can't. Because it's local people, and a lot of them know the Yomtovs and know him. But I will give you the address of the central recruiting office in Warsaw. If you can get him to Warsaw there are thousands upon thousands of people there, and he can get lost. That's how people get lost. So try to get him to Warsaw, and there you have a better chance." He wrote down the address. So I gained something, I thought. The man was scared, but the idea was good because in Siedlce the Yomtovs really were known.

Then on the way back I remembered that among the prison guards there was one, Nigelski, who was very religious, who was a very good friend of my father. I knew where this guard lived, so I stopped at his house and when his wife saw me she started crying. She didn't think anyone was left from the family. She was so glad to see me, and she prayed for us, and she was so sorry to hear about Pan Tanenbaum, my father, he was such a fine man. She said that anything I wanted she would do. So I said "I have to get my brother and my husband on a train to Warsaw, and I don't know how to manage this because tickets have to be bought, and they have to be put on the train." Who knew how many Germans were at the train station, I hadn't been there. She said, "I will go and get the two tickets. And I will go with them to the train station and I will let you know if they get there safely. I will pray a rosary for you and light a candle in church. I will take

them and I will have my husband stand on another corner to see if anything happens to them."

When I got back to the house, I got in touch with Wit. The woman who was hiding us was so worried that she was willing to do anything just to get us to leave. She took the message to Wit who was someplace under the tracks at the *bauzug* and told him to come on a certain evening. Actually, Wit left at the last possible minute, because a day later the Germans killed the *bauzug* workers. So Wit came to the house where David and I were hiding. I gave Wit and David cards and told them that as soon as they were out of Poland and in a safe place, they should write me, and I would try to get myself out. As long as I didn't hear from them I would stay put because otherwise we would lose touch. Mrs. Nigelski brought the tickets, and the woman who hid us and Mr. and Mrs. Nigelski and some of their friends set up a chain of people from her house to the station to make sure that David and Wit got to the station safely. We picked a train which left when it was dark. There was no electricity so it was hard to see. I stayed in the house, and they both left.¹⁶⁹ When they got to Warsaw, they were supposed to mail a card to let me know

¹⁶⁹ Ida's brother Wit recalls these events differently. In a conversation with him in Melbourne, Australia, in June 1998, he said that Ida and David both escaped from the glass factory and hid in the home of David's friend Siekierzynski for about two weeks. Siekierzynski went to the *bauzug* to tell Wit of their plan to go to Germany. Wit recalls that David worked out all the details and was very optimistic and determined to succeed. They all left Siedlce together by train, traveling in a dark compartment in the evening. They arrived in Warsaw close to curfew time and walked to the building where the Germans kept people they had arrested or rounded up in the streets. They told the man at the small reception window that they were volunteering to go to Germany. Apparently, it was thought that volunteers got a better deal. The man looked at them and said, "May God help you." He then told a guard to take them to the hall where the other people were waiting. About 250-300 people were lying there on the floor. Ida and Wit didn't look Jewish, but David did, so he was prepared. He took out of his pocket a bottle of home-brewed vodka and said to the people lying nearby, "If I can't sell it, then we have to drink it." When he pulled out the second bottle from another pocket, people assumed he was a black marketer who had the misfortune to be caught by the Germans. David encouraged this assumption, hinting that he had already been caught once and escaped. The next day they were marched under heavy military escort to the central station in Warsaw, boarded a train, also under heavy guard, and traveled to the transit camp Stargard in Pommern, where they were registered. No one asked for any documents as the traffic for forced labor was so great. The next day

they had arrived and then another card to let me know that they had passed the central office. But the cards weren't addressed to me, they were addressed to the Nigelskis. And Mrs. Nigelski was supposed to bring them to me. Everything was arranged.

This was about December eight or nine. December first Siedlce was declared "Judenfrei" and then I was hidden two days and David was hidden two days under the scales and then we were hidden about three days in the back bedroom in this woman's house. Mr. Nigelski soon came back and said they got to the station safely, and he saw them get on the train with no problem so I thought everything was alright. But then I didn't hear anything. No cards, nothing. Not that the mails functioned so well, but still. A week passed by. I could see that this woman didn't know what to do with me. Two weeks passed by. I was sitting there like a prisoner, and I didn't know what to do. I didn't know where to go, I didn't have any money, I didn't know anybody. I hadn't gone with them because we didn't know where they were going to be sent, how they would divide us. We heard that if a man worked in Germany and said he had a fiancée or a wife, sometimes they sent the woman to the same place. Finally, New Year's Eve, there was a knock on the door, and Mrs. Nigelski was there. Three cards. Two from Wit, one from David. Wit said they got to Warsaw all right, they got on the train to Germany, they put him on a train to Stettin, and David was going on, he didn't know where. Then he wrote from Stettin that he was working in a camp there and not to worry about him, he was fine. The card from David said he was in Kassel. He was working in a factory, the Henschelwerke. They made armored trucks and cannons.

David and Ida were sent to Kassel to work in a factory. A few hours later, Wit was sent to Stettin. He didn't even have a chance to say goodbye. While Wit is convinced his recollection is correct, a letter written by David in the early 1950's states that Ida came to Germany about a month after he did.

I breathed easier, but now I had to figure out how to get myself out. I stayed another day or two, and I decided to go to Warsaw and repeat the performance. I took the train to Warsaw and when it got dark, I went to the Arbeitsamt office. There was no electricity, just a little petroleum lamp burning. There was one man there. I showed him the card, and I said that it was from my fiancé. The Germans had caught him and shipped him to Germany, and he had sent me this card, which I got yesterday. I really wanted to go and be with him in Germany. Could he arrange this? He looked at me for a long time. Then he asked, "You're not Jewish, are you? A lot of Jews are trying to get to Germany." I said, "What are you talking about? I'm not Jewish. You see the card, my fiancé is there." I don't think he was really fully convinced, but he said, "Look, I can make out the papers for you and I can put you in the center, but I don't know about Kassel. Let me find something out." He made some phone calls, and then he said "A man from Kassel is recruiting people for the factory, taking a whole bunch of people, some mechanics, they need special people. He is at the Hotel Bristol. If I can get him to take you with the group, that would speed up the whole thing. In the meantime, I have to put you in the center. If he wants to take you, they will call you out."

The center was in the back of the building. It was like a big barracks. I stayed there two or three days. I heard nothing, and I was beginning to worry. There was no way to go out and ask the man if he got in touch with the man from Kassel. You were like a prisoner there. You slept on the floor, and they fed you bread and water, and you just waited, and they would come in and take groups out. There must have been five thousand people packed in there, and they would come in the morning and count out five hundred people. I tried to stay in the back a bit because if the man came to call me I

wanted to be there. It was no great trick because the place was so crowded they just took whoever was close at hand.

About the third day I saw a man come in, very well dressed, and he picked out a group, maybe twenty people, and I heard the word Kassel. It turned out that he was the man from the factory, and he had me on the list too. I used the name Jadwiga Barszczynska - that was one of my passports. We left the center with another group. There must have been five thousand people - but he told our group to keep together. We went to the train station on lorries and they put us all in cattle wagons, and we left. The train traveled maybe five or six hours. He brought us some bread and some drinks, just for us. He seemed to feel that we were his people from now on because nobody else got anything. We got to Berlin and from there we went to Kassel.

There must have been about fifty thousand people in Kassel working in this camp. The different nationalities were in separate camps, and there were little gradations. The Russians were the lowest, the Poles were a little higher.¹⁷⁰ There were a lot of Frenchmen, because Laval and Pétain had made a pact allowing Frenchmen to go and work in Germany.¹⁷¹ Those Frenchmen hated Laval and Pétain. The man took us to the

¹⁷⁰ I could not verify this number, though it seems rather large. One historian estimates that there were 6,260,000 foreign workers in Germany in May 1943. Homze, *Foreign Labor*, 232. One-third of them lived in private homes, and two-thirds were housed in one of the 22,000 camps for foreign workers. Idem, 267. Conditions in the camps ranged from good to horrible. In some camps there were twice as many workers in a barrack as health standards allowed. Idem, 268. In keeping with Nazi racial ideology, which regarded Russians and Poles as inferior races, barely superior to Jews and gypsies, Russians received the worst treatment. Poles fared only slightly better. To avoid friction, workers were housed by nationalities whenever possible. Idem, 266.

¹⁷¹ Marshal Henri Pétain, a French military hero of World War I, negotiated an armistice with Germany in June 1940 and became head of the government of unoccupied France set up in Vichy. Pétain accepted collaboration with Germany as a necessity, and the Vichy regime enacted several anti-Jewish laws. Pierre Laval was prime minister of the Vichy government for much of its existence. Regarded by some as a total collaborationist, he is depicted by others as the subject of constant German pressure and

employment office where they assigned jobs and gave out work cards. You had to get a work card because without one you didn't get food. They put your name and your number on the card. At mealtimes you didn't go to eat. They would drive in big carts of soup and hand you a plate, and you ate and you handed them back the dirty plate, and they would wash it. The whole meal took ten minutes. There was a medical exam in this camp. Everybody had to strip naked and walk past a row of German doctors. They looked for venereal disease. And if they found that you had lice they would shave your head, which they didn't do with me, but they did shave a lot of women. David was worried about this exam, but somehow he passed.¹⁷² Actually they didn't really look close because they made about one thousand people strip and walk through at the same time. How they could tell if you had something or not I don't know.

The man in the camp employment office started asking me what I could do. I don't know what made me say that I could speak French. It had nothing to do with anything. When I told him this, he said fine, they had a lot of Frenchmen and they couldn't communicate with them. He sent me to a department where a lot of Frenchmen worked. The foreman couldn't talk to them - he needed someone who could speak French and German. He said that he would teach me to drive a crane. For two weeks I was on a crane with this foreman, and he taught me how to pick up things with it. You

demands. According to Herbert, Laval tried to delay and mitigate German demands for French workers but ultimately capitulated. He was responsible for the *relève*, which released one French prisoner of war for every three French civilians who went to work in Germany, and for the enactment of compulsory labor service in Germany. Herbert, Foreign Workers, 196-197; Dawidowicz, War, 359-360. As a consequence of his policies, 1.3 million French were working in Germany in August 1944. Herbert, Foreign Workers, 1. Both Pétain and Laval were convicted of treason in 1945 and Laval was executed on October 15, 1945. Gilbert, Second World War, 724.

¹⁷² According to Ringelblum, many Jewish men did not even try to escape to Germany because they feared the medical exam. Ringelblum, Relations, 102. In a conversation with my uncle Wit he confirmed that the men walked past the doctors in large groups, making it difficult for the doctors to

have to be very careful because if you pick up a cannon or a tank and it swings, centrifugal force makes it swing more and more and it can kill a thousand people if it breaks the chain. You have to work it so it doesn't start swinging. I would work on this crane and after two weeks I had to take an exam. If I passed, then I could work in this department. I found out later that I was lucky because the other women worked in the kitchens and scrubbed floors.

At the end of the first day they took us to the camp. It was in an old open mine outside the city, a six kilometer walk through the city from the factory. They never had time to surround it with wires but you couldn't get out of it - there was only one road down. It was like a big hole in the ground, and when it rained the water was up to your knees. They had barracks with windows, but no glass. Twenty people lived in each barrack. Some man took all us new people to an office to assign us barracks. When I told him that I came because my fiancé was there, he said that there were married barracks. So he put me in this barrack where there were twenty couples, instead of twenty people. Then he went to get David. David didn't even know I was there yet. You can imagine his reaction when he saw me.

So there we were in the barrack. Every day a different person had to get up at four a.m. to get coffee. The coffee was in the middle of the camp, in a kitchen type place where they didn't really cook. The coffee was like water, and it got so that nobody wanted to get up to get it because nobody drank it anyway. Every second day, three people got a small loaf of bread. If you were a couple, you had to find a third partner. If three people did not come for this bread, you didn't get it, because they didn't cut the

loaves. They would only give three people this loaf of bread. You also got a slice of blutwurst - blood sausage - and a little bit of marmalade, but you had to come with a piece of paper because the marmalade came in big cans and they would spoon out a little on your paper and if you didn't have the paper it was your loss. In the factory at noontime they would feed you a soup which was mostly sweet potato, some leaves, hardly any meat. On Sunday there was a slice of meat. When you came home at night you were supposed to eat the bread with the marmalade they gave you in the morning.¹⁷³

The barrack was filthy and crawling with lice. With forty people, you can imagine. In the middle was a little iron stove, hardly enough to warm the cold winters in the mountains. There was a kitchen which cooked for the German guards, and sometimes they would throw out frozen potatoes or rotten potatoes, or little pieces of wood, so we would go there and scrounge in the garbage. Sometimes we would find a potato or a few pieces of wood and make a fire in the little stove.

David had a good job in the factory. He worked in the toolshed. If a tool broke and someone needed a new one, he would go to the toolshed and David would give him a new tool. It was a good job because a lot of hammers got broken, and hammers had wooden handles. When someone brought in a broken hammer, they would separate the

¹⁷³ Nazi policies on feeding foreign workers went through three phases. From 1939 to spring 1942, racial ideology significantly influenced their treatment; Poles and Russians were fed less because they were *unttermenschen*. From spring 1942 to summer 1944, some inequities were eliminated, though Eastern workers never received the same amount of food as other foreign workers. The government instituted a weekly ration on March 22, 1942; it consisted of 450 grams of meat, 225 grams of fat, 2800 grams of bread, and 5250 grams of potatoes. Eastern workers got 300 grams less. Homze, *Foreign Labor*, 271-272. Foreign workers received their food in camp or factory canteens, in the form of a cold morning meal and a warm evening meal. Those who worked more than ten hours a day got a thin soup at midday at their workplace. Workers criticized the food bitterly, and government inspectors confirmed that the food in many camps was poor, partly because the kitchens were poorly managed, partly because they were run for profit and didn't give the workers all the food provided. In the last phase, from summer 1944 to the end of the war, the regime encouraged employers to use food as a reward and punishment; they were told to give

wooden handle from the iron head. The shop foreman was a decent man, and he would look away and let David hide two or three of those wooden handles under his clothes. When he came to the barrack, we could make a fire and everybody would get warm. Also, if he worked the Sunday shift, that foreman always gave David his Sunday dinner, so David used to have two potatoes and two slices of meat on Sunday, which was a really big deal because on Sunday there was no lunch-time soup.¹⁷⁴ Sunday dinner was always a cold potato baked in the peel and a slice of cold meat. Also, if you came to work on time and they were satisfied with your work, you got coupons with which you could get something at a little store in the camp. So, from time to time we got coupons. Every two weeks we also got a statement of earnings, that we had earned so many marks, but room and board were deducted, our clothes were deducted, so we would wind up with about one mark.¹⁷⁵ We also got three or four cigarettes every week or so. David and I smoked, but the cigarettes were very valuable, so we decided not to smoke. Sometimes we would trade the cigarettes for bread. Some people liked smoking a lot, and some had connections so they got a little extra bread. There was a lot of trading going on. We got the cigarettes so we could get a little extra bread, because you couldn't really survive on what they gave you. So I was driving the crane and David was working in the toolshed. And we thought, well, we made it through the worst, if this was what it was, we could

good workers extra cold food and to deduct it from the rations of poor workers. *Idem*, 274-276.

¹⁷⁴ Giving a foreign worker a sandwich or some tobacco was punishable by one or two months imprisonment. Herbert, Foreign Workers, 126.

¹⁷⁵ Most employers deducted 1.50 Reich marks per day for room and board. Homze, Foreign Labor, 274. Foreign workers were supposed to bring clothes with them; they did not get ration cards for clothes. However, many Eastern workers were so poorly dressed that the German government established a system whereby they could rent clothes from their companies. The rental fee was deducted from their wages. *Idem*, 277.

survive the hunger, the lice, the cold. How long could the war last? It was already 1943. For us, the war had already gone on for over three years. We figured that it was not going to last forever. And we began to see signs of that in the factory. There was a shortage of certain tools. You heard the Germans talking amongst themselves.

They gave us some shmattes. I still have my gray coat and the dress I wore. They gave us wooden shoes.¹⁷⁶ At first I worked in a department where they made cannon barrels. This is a delicate operation because if there is any deviation inside the aiming apparatus, if it is not exact, they can't aim it where they want to. I would bring them out and lift them up, and drive them over to the lathes and put them on the lathes and the water would run, and they would smooth out. When I got a little better, they moved me to another department where they put the cannons together. That was complicated because I had to lift each part and bring it down and they would screw it on. It was very delicate work because you could damage it very easily. First I brought the undercarriage down, then I brought the barrel down, then finally the aiming apparatus. At the end, German officers would come in and attach this apparatus, which was all wrapped up. Then I would pull up the whole cannon, drive it out, put it on a flatcar and come back. That was my job. There were a lot of Frenchmen in that department, and I got very friendly with them. Because I was high up, looking down, I could see that they did a lot of sabotage on the machines. When the Germans weren't around things were done

¹⁷⁶ Eastern workers were given either wooden shoes or shoes with wooden soles and two straps. "The shoes were so poorly made that many...preferred going barefoot..." Homze, *Foreign Labor*, 279.

incorrectly, and within a short time a lot of the machines were immobilized because the Germans didn't have spare parts.¹⁷⁷

The foreman in this department was an old man named Schmidt; by that time all the younger Germans were in the army so they called people to work who normally would already be retired. He was a fairly decent man, and after a while, like a month or six weeks, he would come up on the crane and sit with me. Then he started coming up with his lunch, and he would give me some. They didn't have too much to eat either, maybe two pieces of bread, but he would give me a half to eat. He took an interest in me, and he treated me like a father would. Once he even brought me a sweater. I suspect that he also saw that the Frenchmen were doing some things they were not supposed to do, but his heart wasn't very much in the war. Maybe his son was in the army. I met a lot of older people, especially those who lost children in the war, who did not totally support Hitler. Anyway, I got friendly with a lot of those Frenchmen, and they started telling me about Laval and Pétain. We didn't have any radio or anything, but we knew about bombings because we could hear them, and Kassel started getting bombed. One day they brought in a lot of tanks, camouflage tanks, and made us paint the tanks white. The next day the Frenchmen told me the tanks had to be painted white because the Germans were taking them to Russia. Later we painted tanks tan to go to Africa. So we had our news, though we had to figure it out ourselves.

¹⁷⁷ Penalties for sabotage were harsh, but it is difficult to determine how many acts of sabotage were committed, first because such acts were obviously meant to go undetected, second because the definition of sabotage was ambiguous. The term encompassed self-mutilation, negligence, and unsatisfactory performance. While the Gestapo did record some clear instances of sabotage, loafing or working slowly were much more common forms of rebellion. Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 346-347.

At about this time I began thinking I was pregnant, but I didn't know. Back in Siedlce when I went to be photographed I was sick and the woman in whose house we were hiding took me to a doctor. The doctor was a woman, and she examined me and told me that I had an infection. She said it would go away but she had no medicine to give me. She also told me that if I ever wanted to have a child, I would need an operation. Since having a baby was the farthest thing from my mind at that time, I really didn't worry. The infection lasted a while and bothered me, but I considered it a minor problem. In the factory I was very skinny, but suddenly I had this hard bulge. I thought that I had a tumor, but I didn't worry about it. None of those things worried me at that time.

In the meantime something happened in the camp. When I first arrived, David told me that the man who ran the little store where we used our coupons was a Jew, a religious Jew. On Friday night he had candles out in the window. David could not understand how this was possible. In the store he sold a slice of bread, a lebkuchen and also beet salad, which was a big treat because it contained a little vinegar, a little taste. My first Friday in the camp I went to the store and the man looked at me and asked "You are new here?" I said, "Yes, from Poland." He talked but I didn't say much because David had told me to be careful, not to tell him anything. David thought that he was put there by the Gestapo. I bought some salad with my coupon, and he gave me a little extra, as if to make friends, but we didn't trust him.

Around April the news suddenly went around the camp that a woman who worked in the camp office was pretending to be a German but was really a Jew with false papers. They discovered her and they executed her. Then everybody started saying that

there were lots of Jews hiding in the camp and we had to find them. The next day they found another woman who had run away from a camp and the situation became very tense. They started looking at David. When the Poles got their pay stubs or their coupons, they didn't look at them. But David was an accountant; he read the figures like the German government was actually going to pay him. The Poles knew that he was different, that he wasn't one of them. He would cut his bread in little pieces and eat; they would grab the whole thing. In the first building where he lived before I arrived, they had branded him a Jew long ago. But nobody said anything because there was no talk. When these episodes with the women occurred, the men from the first building came over, and they started whispering to the people in our building.

Among the men in our barrack was a Pole from Radom. Radom had a big armory with a very strong union that was a bit leftist, and he was one of the union leaders. I guess he came to the camp to disappear, and we became friendly with him. He was more intelligent than the others. He knew we were Jews because everybody was whispering. One day, I was in the barrack because I had a night shift. If you had a night shift you slept in the daytime, but you had to have a note pinned to your bunk because the Germans checked the barrack during the day. He was also in the barrack, and we started talking. I told him that I had become pregnant, and he said, "Look, they are putting barbed wire around this camp, but it's not finished. There's one side that's open. If I were you, I would leave. I think that when you are pregnant, they send you back to Poland. They put you in a nunnery to have the baby, and then you can come back to Germany. The best thing for you to do is to go back to Poland." It was true that in the beginning, if a Polish worker got pregnant, the Germans would send her back to her family in Poland, and if

she didn't have a family they would send her to some nunnery to have the baby, but at this time they had stopped this practice because Germany was already in disarray.¹⁷⁸ "But", he continued, "I'm worried about Tadek."¹⁷⁹ That was David's name on his papers. "The men here are talking - maybe he should leave." That night when David came back from work he was white as a sheet. He told me that somebody in the factory jostled him and called him "Jew". He was scared, and he said "I cannot stay here any longer because it's already out. People know." So I told him what the man from Radom said. And he asked, "Well, how do we get out of here? We need different papers." If you ran away from the camp and they caught you, they shot you. So we needed another set of papers. I had two passports, so I just had to tear one up and use the other.¹⁸⁰ But David only had the papers with his Arbeitsamt name, the name that was on the baptismal certificate. The next day this Pole from Radom told me that he could give me some papers for David. He said that a young man had arrived from Poland and he had a baptismal certificate too, which was not his, and he was getting a work card. Once you got a work card from the camp you felt secure because nobody looked at your papers. If we wanted this certificate

¹⁷⁸ The first measures dealing with pregnant foreign workers, enacted in August 1941, required them to be sent back to their countries of origin. Homze, *Foreign Labor*, 282. However, when pregnancies increased, especially among Polish and Eastern workers, the Germans assumed that the women were deliberately getting pregnant so they could go home. At the end of 1942, the government decided that pregnant women would no longer be sent home. They could remain in the Reich and have their children; children of "good racial stock" would be brought up as Germans in special homes and children of "inferior racial stock" would be placed in nursing homes for foreign children. In March 1943 Polish and Eastern workers were granted the right to request an abortion. Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 270-271.

Both the party and the public considered the large numbers of pregnancies among the Poles and Eastern workers scandalous. The German Bishops' Conference begged the government to let the Polish workers marry, but the regime refused to permit it. *Idem*, 269-270.

¹⁷⁹ David's false name in the Kassel factory was Eugeniusz Reck. When he left the factory, he used the name Tadeusz Myszkowski. The man from Radom would probably not have called David "Tadek", a diminutive of Tadeusz, because he was using the name Eugeniusz at that time.

¹⁸⁰ Ida's false name in the factory was Jadwiga Barszczynska. When she left the factory, she used

for David, this man would give it to him. They were all in the underground. They tried to help, but you had to be lucky and find the right people. We happened to meet this man, and he gave David this certificate, which was also for a younger man.

We decided to try to get to Switzerland. We had heard that if you could get there, the Red Cross would take care of you. But Kassel was up north, so how could we get there? We were still stupid. With all our experience, we developed a way to survive, of scheming how to survive, without actually realizing what the facts were. We knew there was a North Sea Express in Germany, but we also knew the war was going on and that we were Jews, Jews who were running away from an armaments camp. We decided to get on this train - we knew it went through Kassel because we passed the train station on the way to work - and to go south, as far south as we could. We also heard that when you got far south there were people from the underground who would get you over to Switzerland. You didn't actually have to get to Switzerland; when you got south you could find people who would get you there. How we were going to find them, how we were going to go through the Alps, how we were going to do all this with no money, looking the way we looked, dressed like we were - that we really didn't consider. We thought we could do it, so we decided to get on this train and go as far south as we could. Since we looked like prisoners, we made up a story that we were riding on a transport, and it was bombed, and the train stopped, and everyone ran out, and when we got back on the train, we obviously got on the wrong train, so we were lost and needed help badly. We figured that the only thing we could do if we were caught was give a plausible story. We also decided to pretend that we didn't know any German, that we just spoke Polish.

We thought that way they would feel free to speak among themselves without worrying that we understood, and we could follow what they were saying. We destroyed the camp work cards, but I had the Polish passport and David had the certificate so we thought it might work.

Anyway, somehow, through somebody, I don't know how, David managed to get two tickets on the train. And we went to the station and got on the train. I wore a gray coat, which didn't show anything, and David wore a jacket. I had my old shoes, and I think I wore the sweater the foreman gave me. The train was packed with people. We sat down on the floor in a corner, and the train pulled out of the station. And I thought, so far, so good. What we didn't know at the time was that travel was restricted even for Germans. Even a German needed a special permit to get on a train. So how we managed to get that far, I don't know. But as the train moved on, we saw two Nazi policemen with guns checking everybody's papers. Well, we didn't have any papers. All we had were the passport and certificate. The policemen got to us. They looked at us. They didn't believe their eyes. In Polish, we said we have no papers. We talked Polish, they talked German, blah, blah, blah. They didn't understand, they didn't know what to do. We just sat there, and repeated in Polish that we were lost, we were lost, we didn't know where we were going. Someone asked what "stadt" we were going to, and named some cities. We just kept repeating that we didn't know, we didn't know, we didn't know anything. Finally one of them told us to sit still until the train got to Würzburg. So we sat. We sat and the train traveled a long time.

We finally got to Würzburg, and they took us off.¹⁸¹ They took us to the station, and they dragged in a German who could speak Polish. Not really well. We told the same story. He asked where we lost the transport. We said we thought it was Berlin. We knew all the transports went to Berlin. He asked what happened. We said, we didn't know, there were bombs falling, and everybody was scared, and we ran off the train, and when we came back we got on a train, the train moved, and when we looked around we were on a different train. We didn't know where it was going. Then he asked if we knew where the transport was going. We said we thought Bayern, but we didn't know where Bayern was.¹⁸² We were still acting dumb. Then he asked when we left Warsaw. We knew the hours, because we had gone through the whole process, so we said in the morning. Then I heard those two policemen talking and one asked the other, "Is there any way we can telegraph Warsaw and find out if there actually was such a transport?" The other man answered "No, there's no way, the communications are very bad, because of the bombings, and they have lots of transports going every day." Then the first man said, "We can check their names," but the other man replied, "There are no names on the transports. They just grab a bunch of people. There is no way you can check names." I heard this and I figured if there was no way they could check, there was not much they could do. They continued this discussion, with one man insisting that they check out our story, and the other man saying there was no way they could check it out. Then the first man asked, "What do we do with them?" The second answered, "We'll put them in prison and see what happens." They took David away to one prison, and they took me to

¹⁸¹ Kassel is about one hundred miles from Würzburg.

¹⁸² Bayern is German for Bavaria, the southern German state that borders Austria.

another. They put me in a waiting room with a lot of women. Some were Polish, and we started talking, and they told me that the farmers in this area were having a hard time because all their sons were gone, and anyone who was caught was put to work. I told them about David, and they said there was another camp which was very bad where they took the men and beat them. The Germans questioned me again and I had to repeat the same story, and then they put me in a cell by myself. I don't know how long I was there, I didn't know if it was day or night, but it must have been a few days. They also put in a light bulb, and they gave you work to do. You couldn't sit there and do nothing. They threw in a whole basket of army socks to darn.

About three times they took me out for interrogation. They brought me into a little room where there were people waiting to be interrogated. You had to stand facing the wall. Everyone stood around the room facing the wall, and sometimes you stood for two hours. You couldn't talk, you couldn't look at the others, you just had to stand facing the wall and they would call you in and question you. During one of these interrogations, I heard one of these Gestapo men say to the other, "I can bet you anything that this Polische schwein, this Polish pig, knows German better than I do." The next time I came in he said to me in German, "Sit down," but I didn't. Then he said, again in German, "In the other room there is bread. If you want something to eat you can go and get it." I didn't move, and he didn't bring out the bread. It was just a test, a trick. They tested you and you got prison-wise, street-wise.

They put me back in the cell, and the next morning the warden came in and said, "Come on, you are going." I asked where I was going. He answered, "You are going to work in the fields." He brought me into a room where some other people stood. I was

worried about David, so I said, "I came here with my fiancé, where is he?" He looked at a paper and he said "They will bring him too, don't worry, he'll be there." They took us all to a little train station and put us all on a train, David too - he was at the station when we arrived. Then the man said to us in Polish, "We are not sure about you, we think you were spying, so you are not getting any papers now. But the farmers need help, so you can work until we find out what to do with you. We will let you know what happens."¹⁸³ They took us to a farm, a vineyard in Bayern. It was outside Würzburg in a place called Escherndorf.¹⁸⁴ They make good wine there. The vineyard belonged to an old couple who had three sons.¹⁸⁵ All three were in the army, and the vineyard was going to pieces. This farmer was boiling mad. He needed people to work, so whom did he get? Us. We didn't know anything about farming, and farming in the vineyards is very hard. You have to carry up the soil because the wind blows it down. You have to know how to cut the vines. Our physical condition was terrible. I was pregnant, and I was beginning to feel pregnant. They put us up in a barn and they weren't bad, they gave us food which we hadn't seen in years, because they wanted us to work, so they figured at least they had to feed us. We ate like horses, whatever was on the table was eaten. But work - we didn't

¹⁸³ Apparently it was not uncommon for foreign workers to leave a workplace to return home or to move to another site where working or living conditions were supposed to be better. Allied air raids destroyed factories and living quarters and diminished bureaucratic efficiency, making it easier for workers to abscond. A worker could go to a different camp and introduce himself as a new worker who had lost his papers. In fall 1942 the Germans instituted manhunts and stricter checks of trains, roads and bridges to catch fugitive workers. Those who were caught were supposed to be returned to their former workplace, but this rarely occurred, either because the worker wouldn't reveal his past identity or because the German would just turn him over to the nearest labor office for redeployment. Fugitive Eastern workers and Poles were often handed over the Gestapo, which sent them to their concentration camps. In 1944 Speer complained that thirty to forty thousand fugitive workers were being caught each month. Herbert, Foreign Workers, 342-344.

¹⁸⁴ Escherndorf is a village on the Main River.

¹⁸⁵ The farmer's name was Adam Sauer.

know what to do. We were very worried because if they called the police and told them we were not good for work, what were we good for? To eat the food they needed? We were terribly upset, and we really tried, but there was no way we could work this vineyard. They obviously realized this too, because somehow they arranged a transfer to another farm where they thought we might work out. They needed people who knew about vineyards, and we didn't. They obviously didn't say that we were not good workers, they just said that we were not what they needed. So they took us to Obervolkach, to a big farm where there was a mill and a little vineyard which was just a sideline.¹⁸⁶

At the farm they had a regular little labor camp. There were about ten people, a Russian girl, a couple of Poles. The owner was a big Nazi, a Nazi official for the whole district. His name was Karl Englert. He was in the army as a punishment because he was guardian of some young girl and he had done some things he was not supposed to do. His wife found out, and the girl's family found out, and there was a big to-do, and instead of putting him in jail, they put him in the army. He was a devil, a terrible person. When he came home, he would scream at us and beat us. Frau Englert was not too pleasant either. They didn't have a barrack to house everyone together, so people slept in different places. She had permission to breed hogs, so they had about twenty sows. Above the sows was a netting where they kept hay, and we were assigned to sleep up there. The other people were in the cow barn. But we all had to come down and eat together, because she had special food for us.

¹⁸⁶ Obervolkach is a village about a mile from the town of Volkach, which is about twelve miles from Würzburg.

So they brought us to this farm, and we were very worried. We worried about David living so close to the Poles. We worried because we still did not have any work cards. One day we were up in the vineyard and we looked down and saw two policemen going into the house. David turned to me and said "We don't have to wait for them. There's a train going by at the bottom of the hill. Let's just go down and jump under the train and finish it all. It's enough. I don't want to go to more prisons, I don't want to go through this anymore. I'm sure that the policemen are here to get us, and then we'll have to go through the whole thing again." I said to him, "I don't want to do it. I'll run down and see what is going on." During the day we could run in the fields because we worked in different places. We could go in the kitchen because sometimes we had to bring in something, and after dinner we had to wash the dishes there. I ran down and crawled under the window, as if I were looking for a hoe or a rake, and it turned out that they had come to give us our work papers. So it was all right and we stayed there. And those Poles - I don't know if they knew he was a Jew or not - but they started to respect him. We were lucky in one respect: they were really country folk, and to them he was like a city slicker. They thought that people from the city were not good for anything anyway, so if he didn't know how to do something, they would say, "Oh, he's from the city." And sometimes they would help him; if something was heavy, they would lift it. They were young men, nineteen or twenty years old, like bears. They did the same work in Germany that they did in Poland. There is a story about a Polish peasant who is drafted into the army. The sergeant says, "In the army, you have to get up early." The peasant asks, "What time?" The sergeant says, "Four a.m." The peasant says, "So late?"

Frau Englert was running this big estate by herself, and she appreciated those Poles. She would give them better food, because without them, she would have been lost. She could also steal because they produced so much. She would steal milk and meat and sell them on the black market. They worked hard, and they thought they were big shots because they were running this big farm with a bulldozer and all; they didn't have all this machinery in Poland so they thought they were doing great. So when David couldn't do something they joked, "Oh, the city slicker, let me do it, watch how it should be done." In the meantime I was looking more pregnant. When I first arrived it didn't show, but when I started eating better, it started showing. Frau Englert didn't like the situation. She didn't like it at all. She wanted me to have an abortion, and she took me to the village doctor. He was an old man, in his seventies, and he refused, he absolutely refused. So she arranged for you to be kept by a family in the village.¹⁸⁷ I don't know how she found them. They were an older couple with grown daughters. Mr. Hoffman was a Nazi; he was in the party. They took you right after you were born. We stayed on the farm, and they took you to their house in the village.¹⁸⁸

When you were born, there was no doctor present. I was milking a cow, and I don't know if the cow kicked the bucket and the bucket hit me, but all of a sudden, water started pouring out of me. I didn't know anything so I just kept working. I didn't feel any

¹⁸⁷ A regulation adopted in March 1943 allowed pregnant Polish and Eastern workers to request an abortion. Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 270. However, it is not known whether the requests were truly voluntary or coerced. In any case, some Catholic doctors refused to perform abortions. Once a child was born, he was either raised as a German in a special home if he was of "good racial stock" or placed in a nursing home for foreign children if he was of "inferior racial stock." In keeping with Nazi racial ideology, children of Western workers were only placed in German homes if the mother consented; children of Polish or Eastern workers could be taken away without the mother's consent. *Idem*, 271.

¹⁸⁸ The "you" to whom Ida is referring is her daughter Helen, the writer of this thesis. Recall that the narrative is based on tapes recorded by Helen in which Ida recounted her experiences to Helen.

pain or anything. Later, Frau Englert's mother asked me how I was, and I told her what had happened. She wasn't very perturbed. She said, "Oh, if the baby is born, it's probably going to be dead." They probably were glad, but I was terribly shaken. Later that night we washed the dishes, we went upstairs to the hay, and I started feeling pains coming. In the morning, an old woman came from the village, and you just popped out. There was blood on the ceiling. The flesh tore, and it was never repaired. This old woman cut the umbilical cord, and I was at work digging potatoes two days later.¹⁸⁹ Nobody asked questions there. You just got up and went to work.

Soon we got into a routine. In the morning I had to clean the barn and three times a day I had to milk the twelve cows. This was an experience because I had never milked a cow. The first day I arrived Frau Englert asked me if I knew how to milk cows. I said no, so she brought me to the barn and showed me. Then she left me there and I had to milk them. I was worried because if you don't milk a cow correctly the milk disappears. She knew how much milk she had to get and she had to deliver a certain amount.

At some point Frau Englert found out that I knew how to sew and knit, and that really saved me. From then on when it was a rainy day, she would take me to a room where she had a sewing machine and baskets of clothes to be mended, and I would sit there and sew. It was a little protected; I wasn't out in the rain, like all the others. Unfortunately, she had a mother who was a real farmer's wife, who just couldn't stand the idea that I was not working in the fields, since the purpose of being there was to work in the fields. But slowly, as time passed, I would spend more and more time sewing and

¹⁸⁹ My birth certificate from the district hospital states that I was born in Volkach on September 16, 1943. My name is given as Helene Swiatek. I do not know whether Ida was hospitalized or whether the hospital merely issued the certificate.

knitting and doing things for her and less and less time in the fields. I would work there only at really important times, like during the harvest or when the potatoes had to be dug. I still had to milk the cows three times a day and clean up the barn in the morning, and wash the dishes after dinner, but the rest of the day I would go in the house and work for her. David worked in the fields with the others, and sometimes he worked in the flour mill. They sold flour in five and ten-pound bags, and the bags had to be weighed and sealed, so sometimes he operated the little machine that did that. The Poles used to do it, but they let him because he was the city slicker and was not much good in the fields. It helped because it was much easier work than the field work.

We also had about twenty Frenchmen nearby. They lived in an apartment above the Chief of Police, and in the morning they would disperse to different farmers to work. One of them worked with us and ate with us during the day; his name was Hubert. They were prisoners of war and were treated better than we were. They were all young men so the farmers' girls liked them and fed them. On Sunday the German girls would bring food to the apartment for them. They marched in with fancy baskets all dressed up to meet the Frenchmen. It was punishable by death to have an affair with a prisoner, but they managed.¹⁹⁰ The Frenchmen had a little hidden radio and they would tell us what

¹⁹⁰ "Prohibited contact with foreigners and prisoners of war" was made a criminal offense at the end of 1940. Penalties ranged from six months to four years imprisonment for the German woman and two to six years for the French man. However, regulations forbidding all contact between French POWs and Germans except those required by work were difficult to enforce because the French POWs worked in small groups on farms and in factories all over Germany. They had more freedom of movement and were better liked than workers of other nationalities. Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 124-128.

Sexual relations between French POWs and German women were a major concern for Nazi authorities. Some Nazi officials wanted the French POWs to be executed for such conduct, but others feared the political ramifications of such severe punishment. The military courts generally sentenced them to three years imprisonment. *Idem*, 129. In keeping with Nazi racial ideology, sexual relations between German women and Polish or Eastern workers received harsher punishment. *Idem*, 269. To solve the problem of sexual relations between foreign men and German women, the government and business

they heard, so we started learning the news. They were so well organized that toward the end of the war they actually hid an American pilot for two weeks. The Chief of Police lived downstairs and he never knew. They found the pilot in the fields where his plane was shot down, and they smuggled him upstairs and hid him. The Germans never found out.

They also used to give me reports about you, especially the oldest one. His name was Victor, and he looked like he was in his forties. When they saw you in the fields with Mrs. Hoffman they would come and tell me. Later, at the end of '44 and in '45 when food was really scarce even for them, they would get prisoner-of-war packages from the Red Cross with cans of margarine. From time to time they would bring us some margarine so we could put some on the bread, and occasionally on the side, so nobody saw, they would give us a little piece of chocolate for Mrs. Hoffman. They were very nice, especially when they got chocolate. It was thick and wrapped in red paper. They would share half a bar among themselves, and they would give me a piece and tell me to give it to Mrs. Hoffman. Her husband was a guard in Schweinfurt, which was not far. I don't know exactly how far, but I know that when the Allies bombed Schweinfurt we saw the planes and some planes fell down on our fields, so we were close. They must have had sixty or seventy thousand Russians working at Schweinfurt. They had the biggest kugellager factory in Europe.¹⁹¹ I think the Americans dismantled it after the war. The army could do nothing without ball-bearings; tanks, cannons, cars - they all needed ball-

community set up brothels, staffed by foreign women, in large cities and enterprises all over Germany. Idem, 131.

¹⁹¹ "Kugellager" is German for ball-bearing. Schweinfurt was the site of one of Germany's main ball-bearing factories and was bombed numerous times by the Americans and British in their attempt to cripple German industry. The town is about twelve miles from Volkach.

bearings. They were vital to the war effort, and that's why so many people worked there, and that's why it was bombed so many times. When there were air raids, the Germans would lock the barracks, they wouldn't let the Russians out; if the bombs hit the barracks, the Russians died.

Time passed like this. Winters were very hard because it was cold and we had to work in the fields, and we didn't have any warm clothes. We had wooden shoes, and the mud would stick to them, so they became very heavy. Sometimes Frau Englert would give me some old thing to wear, but it was very rough. We had to clean the hogs and the cows, and we had to dig a lot of sugar beets and potatoes. She had a big pot in which she cooked the beets and potatoes for the hogs, and we would steal some boiled potatoes because when the little piglets were born she fed them milk. By the end of '44 I thought that I had gotten a bit friendly with her. I had been there over a year, and I had made a lot of clothes for the family and knitted a lot of sweaters, and I felt that she had begun to appreciate my work. By then, the food situation was very bad, and I was worried about you, because the Hoffmans were poor people, they weren't farmers like her. I asked Frau Englert if I could take a half liter of milk to you every day. She agreed and gave me a little can, so after I milked the cows and before I ate - after milking the cows we were all supposed to go eat - I would run down the little road to their house with the milk. The Hoffmans lived next to the church in the center of the village, but we were a little outside the village.

Frau Englert had an aunt and uncle who lived in Würzburg, and they used to come to the farm on weekends because the food was better. The uncle's name was Peter, and we called her Aunt Peter because we didn't know her name. They were very prejudiced

against Jews and Poles. They thought that they were really upper crust. Somehow we found out that when she was young this aunt was a maid in a Jewish household, so David and I figured maybe that was the reason she was so prejudiced.

At this time the aunt and uncle from Würzburg got bumped out of their house and moved in with the Englerts. She could not stand to see me getting milk for you. She thought it was terrible. She would tell Frau Englert that she shouldn't let me have the milk because the German children didn't have any. I would try to get away so that she wouldn't see me, but often she did. It wasn't much, a half a liter, but it was really vital.

Once I got into an argument with the aunt. I got really mad and I told her in German "You were a Jewish servant and you are still going to be a Jewish servant." I don't know why this came out, but it did. She got red in the face and ran upstairs. A minute later Frau Englert came down. She said to me, "Do you know what you just did? You told my aunt that she was a maid for Jews. You know what they can do to you for this - they can hang you for this." I was still mad, so I said "Maybe we are Polish but we have nerves too. We are people too." She looked at me - that was already the end of '44, and they were beginning to worry a little bit too - and she said, "I'm going to go and talk to her." I never heard anything more about it. But later David asked me, "Why did you say this? Here it's '44 and maybe the end of the war, and you do a stupid thing like this?" I said, "I don't know, I guess it was just an accumulation of all these years. It just came out."

One lucky thing for us was that the Englerts weren't Catholic. In Escherndorf, the old couple were Catholics; the first Sunday we were there they wanted us to go to church with them, and that created a problem. But then we were moved to Obervolkach where

the Englerts were Protestant. Since we were supposedly Catholics there was no question of us going to church with them. Also they weren't the kind of people who cared - they weren't very religious. We even worked on Sundays. The only time we had off was Sunday afternoon. After we milked the cows and had dinner and washed the dishes and cleaned everything up, we had about two hours before we had to start feeding the hogs and milking the cows again, so we usually used it to wash out the few shmattes we had, because that was our only free time.

As time progressed, Frau Englert got a little softer. As for Herr Englert, he came home on leave every six months or so. The first time he came, he was terrible. He kicked us, he beat us, he was awful. We couldn't wait for him to leave. When he was around you worked, you really worked. The second time he came, it was the same. The third or fourth time he came he kept up his routine, but his heart wasn't in it any more.

Frau Englert also had a brother, Alfonso Zehner, a captain or a sergeant in the army, who was on the Russian front. He came at Christmas of '44 on leave. He was not married, and he seemed to be a nice man. He even helped out in the fields. One day the workers were coming back from the fields with a load of potatoes, and David was sitting on the cart with him, and he told David about Russia and Stalingrad.¹⁹² When David came in, he was very shocked. He was scared that maybe he shouldn't have talked with him. He told David how badly the war was going, so we had news.

¹⁹² The battle for Stalingrad began in August 1942 and ended with the defeat of the German Sixth Army in January 1943. Despite massive bombardments and ground assaults, the Russians refused to surrender the city. The defeat was considered a turning point in the war, boosting Allied morale and converting Germany to a total war economy. Homze, *Foreign Labor*, 144, 209; Gilbert, *Second World War*, 355, 398.

We also had news because sometimes I read the newspaper. When you approached the kitchen entry there were a few steps, and the paper would be thrown on the steps. When you opened the door leading into the house from the steps there was a very long tiled hall. At the end of the hall there was a huge picture of Hitler surrounded by fresh flowers. So I would pick up the paper and walk down the hall to the kitchen, and by the time I had walked this long hall to the kitchen, I had read all the headlines. With this and with what the Frenchmen told us, we had the news.

A few times David wanted to read the paper, so I stole it and stuck it under my clothes and Frau Englert would run around shouting "the verdammte Polen - the damned Poles - they stole the paper." She had suspicions. By that time, she suspected that everything was not kosher with me, but she didn't know that I was Jewish. So the time passed. The work was hard, but we figured that with the war going badly for the Germans, we would make it.

I would see you because every day I would bring the milk, and Mrs. Hoffman became friendlier. She started telling me what she needed. She thought that if I brought milk, maybe I could bring other things too. She didn't have sugar, she didn't have eggs. Unfortunately, I didn't have any of those things either, so it was futile. As for the milk, I don't know if she gave it to you or drank it herself, but the point was that she got a half liter of milk every day.

When a child was born in Germany they would give the mother coupons for a layette. Of course, I didn't get any of these coupons. I didn't have anything. When you were born, I tried to make a little shirt from some shmattes, some towels. I still have the little shirt. I didn't know what I was going to do, and then she came and took you. I

found out later that she got coupons for you and got the clothes she needed and I imagine that they must have given her papers for you. It could be that you were adopted by her. I wasn't human to them, so to them it didn't really matter.¹⁹³

Life went on like this, and you could feel in the air that the Germans were getting a bit worried. Meanwhile, I was getting a little foothold in the house. I would sit there sewing and they would talk a little when I was around and when they had coffee at three they would give me a piece of bread with a cup of coffee. Slowly, a relationship developed. Also the kids did not treat me like the other Poles, like dogs. The oldest boy Kärchen - he was named after his father Karl - must have been about thirteen, fourteen years old at that time. He belonged to the Hitler Youth and he wore the uniform, and he really treated everybody badly, except me. I made him a sweater, and once he even told me how they trained the children to make them hard-hearted. He said that they gave every child in the group a pet, like a rabbit, and they let him keep it for a while and feed it. When the child got attached to the pet, they made him kill it. He told me that he couldn't kill his, but he had to. That's how they taught the children cruelty.

Karl Englert had a brother who lived in a villa near the mill. His wife was wealthy and the villa was very elegant. One Sunday in '44, their little girl - she must have been five or six - was waiting for her parents, but she went close to the mill and fell in the water. They looked for her but by the time they found her and pulled her out, she was dead. I happened to be there when they pulled her out, so I grabbed her and started pumping her arms to get the water out. I carried her up to the kitchen and put her on a

¹⁹³ As stated in footnote 187 above, children born to Polish and Eastern foreign workers could be taken from them and placed in German homes without their consent. Children born to Western workers could only be taken away if the worker consented.

bench, and I tried to work with her while they all stood around. I felt really sorry for them - it was their only child. Of course, she didn't revive. A day or two later they had the funeral. It was a very fancy funeral. The mother had a lot of rich relatives, and they all came down and had a big dinner. We were working in the fields when suddenly somebody came running up shouting that I was wanted immediately in the house. I got very scared, because I didn't know what happened. I thought maybe the aunt I argued with said something. It turned out that they wanted to invite me to dinner because I had tried to help. They didn't put me with the guests because it was a fancy dinner, but they put me in the kitchen, and the maid gave me a really good dinner, even a glass of wine, and they all came and thanked me, which was extremely unusual. I remember I even saved a big piece of bread and cake and hid it under my clothes so David could eat too.

Another Sunday afternoon late in 1944 - we didn't know the date - the road suddenly filled with German soldiers. They didn't look anything like the German soldiers we knew from before. They were dirty and dusty and unshaved, and they were throwing down their rifles. And they were walking - there were no motorcycles or heavy tanks or leather jackets or helmets. It was just a mass of people, beaten people. Some of them had small wounds covered with bloody rags. They were hungry and thirsty. They came by and they knocked on the Englerts' door. They wanted some water but she did not open the door; she didn't give them anything. We were shocked because they were such ardent Nazis and these were their soldiers. She had plenty of food, but she didn't even give them a drop of water. It was the first day that we began to rejoice a bit. The procession started about two in the afternoon, and lasted about a day or two. They went through the yard and down the road in front of the house.

At this same time, the Germans started to build what they called the Atlantic Wall, which was supposed to be like the Maginot line. After D-Day they decided to build a fortified wall to repel the Americans, and they needed people to dig the trenches.¹⁹⁴ They had no more German men because they already had taken young boys and fifty and sixty year old men into the army. So they started taking people from villages, workers from camps and so on. Every village and every farm had to contribute a certain number of people. The Englert farm had twelve foreign workers so she had to contribute a man. Naturally she decided that David should go. She liked him the least because he was the least useful on the farm. But I knew that if he went he would never come back because I knew the Germans made them dig without food and under bombardment. At that time I had a little relationship with her because I spent a lot of time in the sewing room sewing and knitting for her. I felt that I could ask her to let him stay on the farm, but she got very angry and refused. The village also had a *bürgermeister* - a mayor - who assigned people to this work. I went to him and asked him not to send David. I told him that he should send a younger, stronger man. He threw me out of the house, but they didn't do what they actually could have done with me, because they had begun to realize that victory was not so certain.

¹⁹⁴ Actually the Atlantic Wall was already in place when the Allies landed on the Normandy beaches, so it must have been built before D-Day. Ida may be referring to the West Wall, also known as the Siegfried Line, a band of fortifications three miles deep, composed of pill boxes, troop shelters, and concrete projections resembling large dragon's teeth. Also begun before D-Day, in 1938, the West Wall was originally a short band of fortifications opposite France's Maginot Line, but Hitler had it extended from the Swiss border to north of Aachen. The fortifications were neglected for several years, but after the Normandy invasion, Hitler decided the West Wall could serve as a last line of defense to slow or stop the Allied advance and ordered it repaired and strengthened. It was the scene of heavy fighting in the last months of the war. Charles B. MacDonald, The Mighty Endeavor: American Armed Forces in the European Theater in World War II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 333-334.

There was a young Pole, Janek, who worked with us. He was a very delicate boy with delicate hands, a musician, from a city. I don't know if he was Jewish - he didn't look Jewish - but he was a little bit like David because he was not like the others who were farmers and strong and rugged. He came over to David and said, "Don't worry, I'll go instead of you. You have a wife and a child, you stay here and I will go. When the train comes, I'll get on instead of you." There was a train which the people from every village had to get on, but the Germans at that time were in such a state of disorganization that names didn't mean anything. Everything was done by numbers - each village had to contribute a certain number of men, but they didn't check a list or call names. They just had to have the right number. He was very unhappy, he didn't like the fields, and he thought if he got away from the farm and got with thousands of people he would be able to run away.

When the day arrived, we were very tense. David went to the fields where Janek was supposed to go and without telling anybody, Janek got on the train and left. We didn't know what was going to happen; it was the longest day of our lives. I was in one field and David was in the field where Janek was supposed to be. When we went back to the house at noon and Frau Englert found out that Janek had gone instead of David, she was furious. I thought she was going to kill us. She screamed, she threatened to call this person and that person - I think she did call some people, I don't know. We didn't know what she did. She left the house, but later when she returned she had quieted down. Obviously the bürgermeister must have told her that ten men were ten men and if he got them he didn't care who they were. From then on she was very ugly to us.

Weeks passed and there were bombings and we heard a lot of planes flying overhead and we could tell that the front was getting close. Through the underground we started hearing what was going on at the Atlantic Wall, the West Wall, they called it.¹⁹⁵ People were dying by the thousands there and I was relieved that David didn't go because he would not have lasted a week. It was about this time that he had an accident. One day I came back from the fields and they told me that a machine had cut off a piece of his finger. They told me that somebody drove him on the bulldozer across the river to the nunnery in Volkach so the nuns could bandage the finger. At this nunnery the nuns took care of some old people who had been evacuated from an old age home in Würzburg. The nuns had set up a little hospital there. I never found out exactly how the accident happened, but David lost the first joint of the finger. When he got to the nunnery, the nuns kept him there. They needed help in the garden, and when David arrived, they decided that he was the man to do their gardening. For David it was very lucky because they treated him very well. They fed him, and they didn't push him. They made him tear out a few carrots in the garden. This gave him a rest, which he needed because he was really at the end. On the other hand, in Obervolkach, Frau Englert was furious. The first day she didn't say anything. Then she must have called them and obviously the nuns told her that something was wrong with him, they had to keep him. Maybe they lied, I don't know. But then the stay extended to three or four days. So here she was - minus two workers - one who didn't know anything about fields, and one who was a good worker. So it got really tense.

¹⁹⁵ Ida is confusing the Atlantic Wall with the West Wall.

In the meantime, the river had come up, and all the fields were covered with water.¹⁹⁶ I was alone in the barn and there were bombings all night. I was afraid to stay in the barn and I couldn't sleep so all night long I would walk around in the fields. The American planes would fly overhead and they would throw down lights to light up the ground; they looked like chandeliers hanging from the sky. Whole batches of aluminum foil would come down to foil the radar. All night long, the Germans would burn train cars. Volkach had a lot of trains and the Germans would burn them so they wouldn't get into American hands. People would run out and get blankets and cans of food and whatever the trains were loaded with. I was nervous. David was in the nunnery, you were at the Hoffmans and I was there by myself. The police saw me, but they didn't do anything - they knew me by then. But obviously they told Frau Englert that I was walking around in the fields. We were supposed to be locked up at night. She asked me about it and I told her that I was very scared to be in the barn by myself because of the planes and the bombs. She said she would put a mattress on the floor in the sewing room and I could sleep there. To her this seemed like a great kindness. To me it meant that I was locked up at night, because if I was in the house, I could not walk around. So at night I had to go up to this room and stay on this mattress.

David stayed with those nuns for quite a while, several weeks. It really saved his life. They treated him like a mensh.¹⁹⁷ They were persecuted by the Nazis too so they were in the same situation. They didn't have a lot of fancy food, but he ate what they ate

¹⁹⁶ Volkach and Obervolkach are located near the Main River.

¹⁹⁷ Like the German word "mensch," the Yiddish word "mensch" means a person, a human being. In Yiddish the word also connotes a person of good character, one who is honorable and decent and worthy of respect. Rosten, *Joys*, 234.

and the work wasn't too hard. They made him sweep the nunnery and help out a little bit in the kitchen and bring in the food from the garden, so it wasn't taxing.

While he was gone, Frau Englert came in one evening and said I didn't have to sit by myself in the sewing room, I could join them in their living room. This was something, almost like being a guest. The aunt and uncle hated this. They looked at me disapprovingly. When I came in the first evening they were all sitting around darning socks. She gave me something to do too, but it was almost like joining the family circle. They immediately turned off the radio. After about two nights she told them they should leave on the radio so that I could listen to it. Naturally I listened. At that time the Germans had bombs which could be dropped without pilots.¹⁹⁸ They dropped them on London. They developed these bombs at a base on the Baltic Sea and the Americans bombed this area a lot to destroy the bombs. Wit was near there, in Stettin, so I worried about him a lot.¹⁹⁹

Finally, after several weeks, David came back.²⁰⁰ It was sometime before Easter 1945 because on Easter Sunday of 1945 we left Obervolkach. He must have come in March because the water was still very high when we crossed the river. He came back and we went back to the barn. One day I met Mrs. Hoffman on the street. She said that they didn't have anything to eat, could I get her some bread? She probably figured that I

¹⁹⁸ These pilotless bombs were the V-1's, sometimes called buzz-bombs because of the noise their motors made. The "V" stood for Vergeltungswaffe (Vengeance Weapon). MacDonald, Mighty Endeavor, 255. The first V-1 fell on London on June 13, 1944. Deadly but inaccurate, the V-1 killed 6,000 British civilians and injured 17,000 before the last one was shot down at the end of March 1945. Idem, 287.

¹⁹⁹ The bombs were developed at Peenemünde, on the Baltic coast. Gilbert, Second World War, 434. Allied raids on the facility had little effect. MacDonald, Mighty Endeavor, 255. Peenemünde is about fifty miles from Stettin.

²⁰⁰ A certificate from the hospital states that Tadeus Mischkowski was there from December 12,

was the food supplier because I brought her the milk. So I did something very foolish, I stole a loaf of bread. They baked their own bread on the farm and they put the bread on a baker's rack in the sewing room. While I was sewing, I hid a loaf under my coat and when I went with the milk I brought her this loaf of bread. But in the meantime they had counted the loaves and found a loaf missing so there was a big row. It was another close shave, but because of the situation at that time Frau Englert didn't do anything.

One day after a big air raid in 1945 we discovered a Russian couple hidden in the hay. They had been hiding there where we slept for three days, without us knowing. They had run away and hidden there when their camp at Schweinfurt was bombed. They would crawl out at night to find something to eat in the fields, apples or carrots, and that's how they lived. And we didn't know; we were in the same hay loft but they were quiet all day. The other Poles dragged them out and told Frau Englert. She had reached a point where she was so desperate - it was spring and we had to sow the fields - that she said she would keep them if they were willing to work. Naturally they agreed. She said she was going to get papers for them but she never did. So we had two more people, and we did a little less.

We kept a little apart from the other Poles who worked on the farm because we were afraid for David, but they talked to their friends in other villages, so there was an underground news network. We got pretty good news reports from the Frenchmen's radio too. By this time we already knew that the German army was in retreat. The Poles told us that as the Germans retreated they sent special commandos from village to village to kill the foreign workers. They didn't want to have any witnesses. Our experience was such

that we believed this.²⁰¹ So we started hiding at night. Every night we hid in a different barn because we were afraid that if the Germans found us they would kill us. We were afraid to hide any place where there were foreign workers because we were afraid the Germans would know and come looking for them.

At this point Janek came back. He looked terrible. He told us that there was no food and many beatings. He had run away and was under way three months. Poles helped him out. He told us they never finished the wall because the Americans came. Frau Englert was glad he was back; at that point she was glad anytime she could get another working hand. And he was clever, he was a city boy, he wasn't like the hicks from the country.

We must have been hiding like this for a week or ten days, when one Saturday, about a week before Easter, an American plane flew over our village and called on the town to surrender and to hang out white flags. In Volkach the bürgermeister was a big Nazi and instead of hanging out a white flag, he blew up the bridge on the Main River. All the bridges in Germany were mined. The moment he did this, the Americans started bombing Volkach. The planes came down low and they had loudspeakers, so you could

²⁰¹ In the last weeks of the war, many foreign workers, mostly Eastern, were shot by the Gestapo, allegedly for looting and other crimes. Thousands were killed in the Ruhr alone. "The total for the entire Reich is impossible to estimate." Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 372. However, it is not clear that these killings were motivated by the desire to get rid of potential witnesses; it appears that some German employers actually improved their treatment of foreign workers in the hopes of getting a good review when the war ended. Rather the killings were allegedly protecting the German public; the German public approved, seeing Russian looting and theft as confirmation of the base Russian character depicted in Nazi propaganda. Idem, 373. The Germans did not understand that many foreign workers could only get food by looting, as Allied air raids destroyed industrial sites, leaving them without food, housing, or work. German fears heightened after September 1944, when large numbers of foreign workers began to move to the countryside, partly at the urging of Allied leaflets. As authority broke down and chaos ensued, lower-level officials were given the freedom to shoot actual or presumed looters. There were no trials or investigations; anyone suspected of a crime could be killed. As the war drew to an end, even regular citizens killed foreign workers. Some of the incidents reviewed by Herbert led him to conclude that the killings had "less to do with the prevention of looting...[than with] revenge." Idem, 362-364.

hear the pilots hollering. It all happened very suddenly, Saturday afternoon at one o'clock. We all ran into the basement. The bombing lasted about half an hour. Obervolkach took some artillery fire, and we were very scared because the Hoffmans' house was next to the church in the center of the village. We were about half a mile away from the village so David ran there to see if you were all right. Then I came out and I didn't see him so I ran to the village too. Everybody was running, nobody looked to see who was Polish, who was Russian, who was German - everybody was running and I kept running and asking people if they knew where he was. Finally I found him. Behind the church was a house where the minister lived. A man told me that he saw Frau Hoffman run in there with you. So you were there with her and everything was fine.

That same Saturday, at about two o'clock, we saw the first Americans. After the bombing stopped and we found out that you were all right, we were walking down the road, and all of a sudden we saw a whole bunch of Americans coming from the river where the bridge was. You can imagine how we felt. We didn't know if we should cry or cheer. We couldn't even talk to them, they spoke English and we didn't. But we saw them walking along the road, eight Americans, with guns, patrolling the area. All the Germans were hidden and on the road there were only the Poles and the Americans. They stayed until it got dark and then they went back on their boat and left. And we were scared. Because now it was clear who was the enemy and who was not.

Now began a very bad time, a whole week, because during the day we had Americans and during the night we had Germans. In the morning the Americans would send over small groups of ten or twelve men to patrol. They were building a pontoon bridge to replace the bombed one but it took them a few days to get the materials, so the

men would cross the river on rubber boats. At night the Germans would come. It was really scary. For two or three nights we hid in the fields; we didn't know what to do. It was getting worse and worse because even the local Germans were killing the foreigners; if somebody was mean to a worker he killed the worker so the worker couldn't talk. Some more Russians appeared who had hidden some place, we didn't know where. In the daytime, we would come out and do a little work at the Englerts. Somehow Janek got in touch with an American officer and asked him what we should do. He told the officer that there was a whole group of foreign workers and we were afraid we would be killed and after surviving so much, we really wanted to live. He even asked the officer to take us on the American boats across the river. This officer said that he could not take us on his boats, but if we could get across the river, he would try to help us. But we had to get across the river by ourselves. The river Main was the frontline. The side we were on was crawling with German soldiers, and artillery was shooting across the river all day long. We were by the river so the artillery fire would fly over our heads. The Americans couldn't get their tanks over to the side we were on until the bridge was rebuilt, and we couldn't swim across because the river was still high. The Main is wide and swift.

At this point, Frau Englert began getting sweeter. She gave us food to eat, and one day she brought me a little sweater for you. She had a little girl born the same time you were. We also saw you more often. We would go to the Hoffmans' house and keep an eye on you. We knew that we were going to leave the village and that we were not going without you. When Janek came back and told us what this American said, we decided to find a boat and cross over to the American side. So we found a boat, a rowboat. It was Easter Sunday about ten or eleven in the morning. I remember it was

very sunny and the river was high. First, we went to Frau Hoffman's house, not by ourselves, but with a big Pole, and two Russians and the Frenchmen. We opened the door and Frau Hoffman was against the wall with her husband, and she was very scared. We asked her where you were and she pointed to the other room. We went in and you were sleeping, and we grabbed you, blanket and all. We put you in a little wagon and we started running toward the river, which was a long way off.

We finally reached the water and got in the boat. The boat was built for ten people and there were about thirty people in it. The water was even with the boat, any minute it could have capsized. It was really a miracle that we made it. So we slowly, slowly went across. The Americans were on the other side and when they saw us they stood and watched, so we felt a little better - we felt that if the boat overturned they would drag us out. But when we first left the German side the artillery fire was flying over, the sky was filled with fire, it was like being under a roof of fire. Finally we got to the other side, but once we were there, we were in the middle of a front line with tanks, with cannons, with soldiers running. Who had time to pay attention to a little group of civilians with a baby? The single people immediately dispersed. We stood there. Finally someone approached us. I don't know what division it was - the American army had a lot of volunteers from the occupied countries whom they put in special divisions. Some of the soldiers were Polish. One officer told the bürgermeister that he had to give us a room and food and clothes for the baby. In the meantime David found a Pole who had a bottle of whiskey and they were very excited by the liberation - because that was really when we were liberated - the war was still going on, but to us it was the end. David was so excited about this liberation and the Pole was so excited that he had

liberated another Pole, that they started drinking. David was not a drinker anyway, and in his condition it didn't take long before he passed out on the road. Tanks were driving, cannons were blowing, and he lay in the sand like a corpse and I stood there in the middle of the road holding you in my arms with this bürgermeister who was supposed to give us a room and food. Finally two soldiers picked David up and there was a parade - me with you in the arms and the two soldiers carrying David to a house. The bürgermeister gave us a room with a big bed and the soldiers dumped David on the bed and left. The bürgermeister brought in a jar of pickled peaches and some milk for you and I sat there. I sat there all day. In the night you woke up and started to cry. You can imagine - you were eighteen months old - you went to bed in familiar surroundings and woke up under artillery fire with soldiers and strangers. I couldn't calm you down and you cried and cried and cried. There was a field kitchen nearby and the soldiers heard you crying and they thought that maybe you were hungry so this big colored man - he must have been the cook - came over with a big bowl of chocolate pudding. It could have fed fifty people. He tried to calm you down and feed you the pudding, and I think he tried to ask me if I needed something else, but I didn't understand what he was saying. You didn't want to eat and then he brought milk to calm you down. That's how the night passed. Finally you calmed down and fell asleep from exhaustion. The bürgermeister brought some shoes and socks and a little dress which he got from some people.

The next morning David woke up, and I went out to look for the other people from our boat. They told me that the officer in charge of the village had told them that we could not stay there because it was a front line and they really wanted to keep

civilians away.²⁰² The officer suggested that Victor, the French major, become the leader of the whole group and that we go to Schweinfurt, which had been taken over by the American army. He thought that they had organized something there because a lot of refugees had already started appearing. He thought that maybe somebody there would know what we should do. The next day we took a little wagon and we started walking, but the group didn't last long. Those men were just freed and they wanted to have a good time and eat and drink and steal. And here they had a man who could barely walk and me with a child. Within an hour we lost everybody. They walked a lot faster than we could with the wagon, and they were stronger and younger. In an hour or two we realized that we were alone except for soldiers. All the men left - some said good-bye and some just disappeared without a word. At a certain point Victor came over and said he was very sorry, but they were all French officers, and they had decided that going to Schweinfurt was not for them. They wanted to go back to France; instead of marching north they were going to start marching west. The Americans had already taken over West Germany so they could get through.²⁰³ They had become a part of the French army again. Actually, he was nice, he said good-bye, and he gave me a map - the others didn't even do that.

²⁰² Allied troops were not prepared to deal with the situation they encountered. Foreign workers and POWs were frequently right behind the front. The troops moved them to the rear and arranged for basic necessities to be provided. Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 377. The Allies knew there would be many displaced persons in Germany when the war ended and developed numerous plans for their care, but when the end actually came they were swamped, as thousands more stayed than expected. UNRRA, which had been created in 1943 to tend to their needs, was undermanned and unprepared to assume responsibility, so the military took charge until October. Dinnerstein, *America*, 11-12.

²⁰³ Apparently many workers and POWs from Western countries set out for home immediately, "clogg[ing] the German roads, sometimes surviving by raiding the villages they passed through, and keeping the Allied troops in a state of constant agitation." Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 377.

So, in a short while, we were alone on the road. We didn't know where we were going, we were just walking. And as we walked, we got on another road, and we noticed there were fewer soldiers, but there were suddenly more civilians like us, bedraggled, hungry, from camps, from factories. The grapevine immediately went into action. People told us there was a village called Prosselheim where kitchens had been set up to feed the people on the road.²⁰⁴ We were very hungry, so we walked until we came to Prosselheim. It turned out that Prosselheim was where the Nazis sent the elite of Rotterdam - all the professional men, doctors, lawyers, engineers. They put them in a camp there and they loaded and unloaded trains. When the Americans came, the *bürgermeister* of Prosselheim, a big Nazi, committed suicide. The freed prisoners elected a new *bürgermeister* who was a Dutchman. He took over the village, and since it was at a crossroads, he immediately established a place where all the people who were walking by could be fed. He slaughtered cows which belonged to the Germans; he opened warehouses of sugar and milk and butter. Hundreds of thousands of people came by.²⁰⁵

When we arrived, they had already set up two pumps for water, long tables, and big, big soup kettles were cooking. There was even meat in the soup. All the Dutchmen were working and they were making the Germans bring slaughtered cows and pigs. You got a plate and food and sat down at a table and ate. The only thing you had to do was wash off the plate and bring it back clean so somebody else could use it. They didn't ask any questions, but they didn't allow anybody to stay overnight. They didn't want to turn

²⁰⁴ Prosselheim is about five miles west of Volkach.

²⁰⁵ In July 2002 I visited the Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation) to see if they had any information on a Dutch feeding center at Prosselheim. They did not.

it into a camp. You could stay and eat but you had to leave. They were afraid if they let people stay, it would turn into a million person camp. So they fed you, they helped if you needed help, but you had to keep going - it was just a stop on the way. But when they saw us with a baby, they said we could stay there and rest up for a day or two. They gave us a room to sleep in and we stayed there about a day. When we left one of the men came over and gave me a big bag of sugar, maybe a pound of sugar, and a piece of butter. He said, "I want you to have this for the child. The child needs butter and sugar, especially sugar. Every time you give her milk, put in some sugar. Be sure that you feed her this." I think he gave us some bread and clothes too. He also told us about the UNRRA.²⁰⁶ He said they were setting up camps for the refugees and trying to get people home to their countries. He said it might be a good idea to go to Schweinfurt because it was a city.

By that time we were a little rested, and we had this sugar which was like gold, but the main thing was we weren't so afraid now of starving because we knew that the roads were full of people. Before we got to Prosselheim, we saw a dead soldier lying on the road. He had a piece of cheese and bread next to him, so we took it and ate it. We were so hungry that we took food from a dead man. It was lying next to him, the bread and cheese, and we just took it. I wouldn't eat it now for a million dollars, but we ate it, we were so hungry. That was before Prosselheim. At Prosselheim they fed us pretty well - a lot of soup - and when we left Prosselheim we weren't hungry anymore. By then we

²⁰⁶ The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) assumed the task of caring for and repatriating displaced persons from October 1, 1945 until June 30, 1947. The I.R.O. (International Refugee Organization) then took over their work. Wyman, DP, 74-75. By June 1947, UNRRA was administering 762 DP centers in Europe. *Idem*, 47.

knew the roads were full of people, people of every nationality.²⁰⁷ They were all the foreigners who worked in Germany, and no one really knew where he planned to go. At that time the planes were throwing down leaflets signed by Eisenhower saying that everyone was going to go back to his own country. We were sure that we were going back to Poland. There was no other thought in our minds. So we walked to Schweinfurt.

Schweinfurt was burning. The Americans had it but nobody had it. The streets were full of dead people. The houses were all bombed out and what was not bombed out was burned. In the midst of all the ruins there were thousands of drunken Russians robbing, raping, looting, killing anything that was left alive. Schweinfurt had about sixty thousand Russians working in the big factory where they made ball-bearings and when the Americans came, they were right there in the city. It was an inferno. When we got to Schweinfurt an American commando took us to what used to be a barrack. It was a long, long building, so long it looked like it had no end. In fact there was no wall at one end because the end had been bombed. The building was occupied by the Russians, drunk, singing, dancing, cooking in the streets, cows, whatever they could get. We had to walk up to the sixth or seventh floor which was reserved for the Poles and the French. There were some Frenchmen and Poles there, all scared to death, because there was a lot of live ammunition around and the Russians were playing with it. They were even killing themselves throwing grenades, shooting off guns, celebrating. And we were on the top floor of this building. There was no water, no electricity, nothing. We were afraid to

²⁰⁷ The Allied Supreme Command (SHAEF) estimated the total number of DPs at 11,332,700, of which 6,362,000 were in the three Western zones. "[T]he blanket label "displaced persons" (DPs) was applied indiscriminately by the Allies to former concentration camp inmates, French civilian workers, soldiers of General Vlasov, Soviet POWs, Italian military internees and female Polish agrarian laborers...." Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 376-377. In August 1944, there were 7,615,970 officially registered foreign

walk down the steps because the Russians were downstairs, drunk, and we didn't have any weapons. We just sat there. We didn't know what to do. You were dirty, and there was no water, so I couldn't change your diapers. We couldn't do anything. Then somebody came up and said that a block away the French had cooked some food and we should go down and eat it. So we walked down and ate. The French had cooked a good stew, with a lot of meat, which wasn't like the Russians'. The Russians were jealous that we didn't eat their food but instead walked a block to eat the French food, and they decided they were going to kill all the Poles. It was very scary. In the meantime, the American soldiers heard about the problem and the MPs came and surrounded the whole place. Within half an hour they brought up some big army trucks and loaded all the Poles and all the French on these trucks and took us all out of Schweinfurt, out of this barrack. It was about eleven o'clock at night. We had been there about five or six hours.²⁰⁸

The soldiers drove us down the road and told us that the Russians would have killed us because they were drunk and they resented the Poles and the French. They brought us to a place that looked like a small city. There were big houses, and all the lights were on. At that time there were no lights because of the blackouts. The houses had hot water and cold water and beds. They were clean. We thought we had arrived in

workers in the Greater Reich, of whom 1.7 million were Poles and 2.8 million Soviet citizens. *Idem*, 1.

²⁰⁸ Reports of looting, theft and acts of revenge by DPs, especially Poles and Eastern workers, circulated widely after the war's end. Generally the acts of revenge were aimed at particular individuals, like foremen or guards, who had mistreated them. American officers said the desire for revenge was strongest among Soviet workers, a phenomenon which is understandable given the miserable treatment they received during the war. One eyewitness British officer said the Russians "caused havoc everywhere, breaking into houses, raping all the women, drinking up whatever alcohol they could find...[They] were not organized, they were just individuals on the rampage. They had been brutalized by what they had suffered as prisoners." *Ibid.*, 378.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that there was a huge amount of criminal activity among the DPs. Their crime rate was no higher than the German population's crime rate, but the Germans preferred to focus on DP crime because it assuaged their guilt about the workers' treatment. *Idem*, 379.

paradise. They gave us a room for ourselves which we thought was a mansion. It was just heaven. The first thing we did was take a bath with hot water. The next morning we found out that this was Wildflecken -a training camp for the S.S. elite. That's why it had everything. It was in the middle of the woods, very secluded, very beautiful. It was never bombed. The Americans didn't even know it existed until they found it.²⁰⁹ In the center of the camp S.S. men squatted in a circle, surrounded by Americans. They were waiting to be taken away. There were warehouses full of things - things the German people hadn't seen for years.

Soon truckloads of refugees started coming in. Since Wildflecken wasn't bombed and could accommodate several thousand people the Americans decided it was a good place to house refugees. So they started bringing in Poles - it was supposed to be a Polish camp. An American commander came and a hospital opened. It all happened in two or three days. It didn't take long because there were so many refugees on the roads. The Americans just picked them up and brought them there. We lived in one of the houses near the entrance because we were among the first to come, but farther down there were more houses and villas where the officers had lived. There was even a movie theater and a swimming pool - it was a whole city. There was a town not far away which was supposed to supply us fresh vegetables and fruit, things like that. We didn't cook, although some people got hot plates from the warehouses.

Sometimes we went to the villas where the S.S. officers had lived. The Americans didn't really want us to go there because the American officers were going to

²⁰⁹ Wildflecken was an S.S. training center, camouflaged by dense pines and so secret its name could not be put on any map after 1938. Kathryn Hulme, *The Wild Place* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1953), 6. Wildflecken contained sixty blockhouses and twelve kitchens within its twenty-five mile

live there. They were also concerned for our safety; they didn't trust the Germans very much. The camp had a lot of ammunition lying around and there were a lot of rumors that Germans had secret weapons and poisons. People feared that they had poisoned food or booby-trapped things like toys. One day I went to a villa with another woman, and I saw a little cut glass carafe on the table - it looked like the Germans had left in the middle of dinner because the plates were still on the table - and I wanted it. Just as I took it, an American came in the room and grabbed the carafe and poured the wine out on the floor. He said if I wanted it I had to take it empty, because the wine could be poisoned. So I took it empty. I think that carafe is jinxed because every time I put it someplace it breaks something.

In that same villa I found something very important to me, a lot of children's clothes. I must have brought out about thirty dresses. I brought out toys and little china tea sets and china dolls. I dragged the whole big bundle back to our room. We had a large room which we considered beautiful. I found some pots and pans and a hot plate. We were supposed to go to the central kitchen, but we could get some food from the kitchen and cook for ourselves. We sat there, and we waited to go back to Poland.

This central kitchen was where people went each morning to get milk. The Germans from the little city nearby used to bring cans of milk there. Adults did not get milk, only children and sick people. There were some children in the camp because the Americans had brought in some Russians who had children too. One morning I got the milk and gave you a little. Luckily you were not much of a milk drinker. In a few minutes you broke out in red splotches. I didn't know what was wrong. At the same time,

there was great alarm in the camp. It turned out that the Germans had poisoned the milk, and a baby died and some people got very sick. We then realized that the splotches were from the poisoned milk and got a doctor. He gave you medicine and put some cream on your skin. He said if you had drunk more it would have been dangerous, but because you only drank a little bit you only had a minor reaction. He sat by your bed about five or six hours and the splotches finally disappeared.

Later that afternoon, the American commander of the camp called the *bürgermeister* to come up and explain why the milk was poisoned. They had tested the milk and found some poison in it. When the *bürgermeister* drove to the commander's office, the Poles and the Russians stoned him. They were building a road and there were stones piled up on each side. They stopped his car and pulled him out and started throwing stones at him. Even after he was dead, they kept throwing stones, they almost had to scrape him off the road - that's how angry they were.

One day a group of Polish officers who were involved in the Polish government-in-exile arrived and moved into the house next door to us.²¹⁰ They were trying to

²¹⁰ The Polish government in-exile was established on September 30, 1939, in Paris and moved to London in June 1940 when France fell to the Nazis. It was headed by General Wladyslaw Sikorski, a highly respected soldier and former prime minister, and included representatives of all the major political parties in pre-war Poland. It organized military units both inside and outside of Poland and maintained close links with Poland until the entry of the Soviets in 1944, even establishing a rudimentary underground government. Davies, *Heart*, 73-77. It never succeeded in becoming the government of Poland when the war ended, however, because the Western Allies acceded to Stalin's demands. Churchill and Roosevelt needed Stalin's help to defeat the Nazis, and Stalin exploited the situation to get what he wanted. What he wanted was a subjugated Poland. In 1942 he revived the Polish Communist Party that he had liquidated in 1937, now calling it the Polish Workers Party (PPR). It denounced the government-in-exile as reactionary and unrepresentative. Biskupski, *History*, 114. In January 1943 he created the Union of Polish Patriots (ZPP), composed of Poles who were willing to carry out Soviet orders and thus consign Polish military and civilian organizations to Soviet control. Davies, *Heart*, 80.

In July 1944, the two groups were merged into the Polish Committee of National Liberation, which the Soviet Army installed as the provisional government of Poland in Lublin on July 22. It had little popular support but all opposition was suppressed. At Yalta in February 1945, as at Teheran in November 1943, the wishes and warnings of the Polish government-in-exile were ignored. At Teheran Churchill and

organize the Poles and you became their pet. Those generals and majors cried when they saw a Polish child. They gave you chocolate and played with you. It was really touching - these old gray-haired men with all their military medals and all they could say was "Helenka this, Helenka that". They would say, "Oh, we haven't seen a Polish child in so long." Then one day trucks pulled up and the Americans started taking everyone out. They said everybody had to leave. At that time if the Americans said something, people did it, so people started getting on the trucks. The camp had thousands of people, so the trucks were very crowded. We did not get on, we hung back and waited until the crowd thinned because we wanted you to be more comfortable. The next day fewer trucks came and then no trucks came and we were left there with about one hundred other people. We didn't know what was happening. The camp was dead and we were left. We got really scared. The American commander told us not to worry, we could stay there because it was going to be a camp just for Poles. It turned out that they took away only the Russians. They left the Poles.

The Russians were wild. There were cannons around the camp - and ammunition all over - and one day the Russians took the cannons and bombarded the little German

Roosevelt accepted Soviet control of Poland; at Yalta they decided that representatives of the government-in-exile should join the Soviet-dominated Polish Committee of National Liberation to create a provisional Government of National Unity (TJRN). Idem, 65-69. Most members of the government-in-exile refused, but Stanisław Mikolajczyk, who had replaced Sikorski as premier when Sikorski died in July 1943, returned to Poland with a few other members to participate in the formation of the new government. His hopes of influencing government policy were soon disappointed; fearing arrest, he fled to London in October 1947. Biskupski, *History*, 118; Davies, *Heart*, 5. The Provisional Government ruled from June 28, 1945 to January 1947. Davies, *Heart*, 5. During this time, Stalin consolidated his control. In February 1945 the Polish Home Army was disbanded and many of its members sent to work camps. In June 1945 leaders of Poland's wartime resistance were tried in Moscow for collaboration with the Nazis and sentenced to prison. Idem, 84-85. In 1946 the first post-war elections were held; these elections were supposed to be "free and unfettered," a concession Churchill and Roosevelt had exacted at Potsdam, but were "preceded by manipulation and intimidation and were conducted with farcical unfairness." Idem, 5; Biskupski, *History*, 127. The newly "elected" government took office on February 6, 1947. Davies, *Heart*, 5.

town. When the Germans fled they went down and looted the whole town. They took everything they could find and brought it up to the camp. There were a lot of Russians. There were Russian officers who had been captured. There were families with babies and children. They formed regiments for the men and took the men and the women separately and their luggage separately. After the war we found out that the Russian government was afraid that these people would demoralize the other Russians by telling them that people in the West didn't live as badly as they were led to believe. So all these people who had lived in Germany ended up in Siberia. None of them were allowed to go back to Russia to live among the Russian people. They were all taken to Siberia.²¹¹

There was one Russian family - a woman and a man and a baby - who lived next door to us, who didn't go. Obviously he knew what was going on because he also didn't rush to get on the trucks. About a week after everyone left, this Russian man came over and asked us if we could give him some money. We didn't have a lot of money, but we gave him ten or twenty marks. He gave me a big beach towel. He was very sad, but he didn't say anything. About a day later some men came in a car and dragged this Russian couple

²¹¹ To keep Stalin's cooperation, Britain and the United States signed a secret agreement at Yalta assenting to the immediate repatriation of all Soviet citizens. This agreement was interpreted to mean that they could be repatriated "without regard to their personal wishes." Wyman, *DP*, 62-63. In the months immediately following liberation, most Soviet DPs returned to the Soviet Union voluntarily, though there were instances where the Allies cooperated in their forcible repatriation. By July 1945 approximately 1.4 million of the more than two million Soviet DPs in the Western zones had been turned over to the Soviet military. Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 380. In October 1945 General Eisenhower banned forcible repatriation in the U.S. zone. Wyman, *DP*, 69. By December 1945, 2,034,000 Soviet DPs, 98% of the total, had been repatriated. Herbert, *Foreign Workers*, 380. Those that remained in the camps clearly did not wish to return. They included Cossacks, Ukrainians, and Balts, some of whom feared punishment for collaboration with the Nazis, some of whom did not wish to live under Communism. They tried desperately to avoid repatriation, stoning Soviet repatriation officers, rioting, fleeing, even committing suicide.

The fate of all the Soviet DPs has not been definitively determined. Those found guilty of collaboration were sentenced to forced labor or death. Those who were not suspected of collaboration spent some time in "filter camps" where they were watched for anti-Communist tendencies. Probably fewer than ten percent were sent to prison or labor camp, but "all former forced laborers...suffer[ed]

out of their apartment. They actually had to carry them out because they didn't want to go. So obviously he knew.

After the Russians left, the American commander started asking people what education they had, and those with some education he enlisted to help run the camp. About two weeks later, while the camp was still fairly empty, the Americans told the people whom they had enlisted to work, like David, to go around and take inventory. They had to count the houses and the things in the houses, like beds, and detail the damage in the houses. The Russians left a lot of houses in poor condition - they flooded them, they knocked out walls. They got drunk and messed them up. The warehouses were broken open. Things weren't in the same perfect shape as when we arrived. It only took a couple of weeks to mess things up. Things happened very quickly; in a day they would bring in convoys of trucks loaded with ten thousand people. So David was working counting all the furniture and stuff. They planned to put everything in a warehouse. The Americans told us they were going to make Wildflecken into a regular displaced persons camp and everyone who arrived would have to get blankets and pillows from the warehouse. It would not be as it was when we arrived - with furnished houses. The UNRRA took the camp over, and David became a housing supply officer for the UNRRA in this camp. The American officer who was in charge of the camp actually represented the UNRRA, and the people he enlisted to work for him worked for the UNRRA. Later he was replaced by a civilian commander. They started bringing in Poles and they made it a Polish camp. The Poles elected their own government and gradually

we learned that there was no Poland to go back to.²¹² And then we really didn't know what to do.

In the meantime I learned from the radio that Wit was alive.²¹³ All day long the Red Cross read the names of survivors on the radio. They read thousands and thousands of names and then they would repeat them. That's all there was on the radio. You would give the Red Cross your name and they would read it. And people listened to hear the names of relatives or friends. When you were in a city you registered with the refugee committee. People also posted little pieces of paper on fences and houses. They would write messages like, "I am from Siedlce. My name is so-and-so and I am going to so-and-so." When you came to a new place you immediately read the walls and the fences to see if there was a message from someone you knew. That's how people found each other. And if you found somebody you followed them. It might sound crazy but people found people that way.

I don't remember how, but somehow we heard that Sarah was alive and in Kassel.²¹⁴ David got a pass and went there and found Benjamin and Sarah. He stayed with them a day or two. Then he came back and told me that Sarah was coming to visit. He did not tell me that he hadn't told Sarah that we had a child. He couldn't bring himself to tell her because of what happened to her child. So Sarah came and there you were. She stayed about two or three days, and she never once looked at you. She totally

²¹² She obviously does not mean this literally. She means that Poland was run by Communists so she and David did not want to return. See footnote 210 above. Many Poles initially planned to go home when the war ended but changed their minds when the Soviets took control of the country. Wyman, *DP*, 79.

²¹³ Wit was Ida's brother.

²¹⁴ Sarah was David's sister. Benjamin was Sarah's husband.

ignored you - she acted as if you didn't exist. It was very tense. Before she left she suggested we come to Kassel. We didn't know what to do or where to go. She had a little apartment there, a room with a kitchen. There was no camp there, and we could be together.

We still lived next to the entrance gate and when a transport of people came David was supposed to assign them a place to live and see that they got the things they needed. One day he came running up the steps - we lived on the second floor. He was not the same man, he was completely changed. He said a truckload of Jews just came into the camp. We didn't know that people from the death camps had survived. We thought everyone who went to those camps had died. When I asked how he knew they were Jews, he said they had a blue and white flag and they wore Jewish stars. At that time every truck that came into our camp flew a national flag, and everybody wore a badge with his national flag to show what country he was from. We wore red and white from Poland. We ran to the window and saw more trucks coming - one after another, maybe ten in all. The people looked terrible, but they all wore a Jewish star. We were in shock. David had to go to the office, and I didn't see him again until late at night because he was so busy. When he came up, he told me that he assigned them all buildings and blankets and beds and they all got double portions of food and special milk and butter and eggs because ninety percent of them were very sick. He didn't talk with them, but he heard they came from the death camps. There was a great commotion in the camp because there were so many doctors and supplies around. We decided to wait and see what happened. We didn't know what to do because we were still "Poles"; we still used our

Polish names. We were afraid to tell the man from UNRRA who trusted us that we were not what we said we were, that we had false papers.

It was very touchy. One day David talked with the young man who was the leader of the Jewish survivors. David told him that he was also Jewish, and the man told David that there were other survivors and that this was just a small part of them because in other places there were other refugee camps. He said they were probably going to go to Palestine later, but right now they had to get back their health. He also told David about a big estate nearby at Gersfeld that used to belong to a Jew and was taken over by a Nazi. The Americans had given it to HIAS or the Jewish Welfare Fund. They were bringing young Jewish people there and training them so they could work on the land when they went to Palestine. They were sending in materials and sewing machines so they could learn a trade. They sent in tailors who survived so if somebody wanted to learn tailoring they could do so. There were also cows and fields so people could learn farming. After a year or so they could go to Palestine. They needed people to run this place - Kibbutz Gersfeld - they called it. A man from the Jewish Welfare Fund came to Wildflecken, and with him he had a Jew from Austria, a very nice man, Pepe, who used to be a taxi driver in Vienna. We met with them and they asked if David would like to manage this kibbutz. Pepe and some other people from JWF would work with him. They would give us a room, and we could live there. By that time we had decided that we didn't have to be Poles any longer; there were Jews, we were Jewish and we could go back to what we were. David agreed and spoke to the American commander who set up the papers and gave us a car. We loaded up everything we had in the car and drove to Gersfeld.

Gersfeld was another story. It was nothing like this JWF delegate said. And it was nothing like we imagined. There was one big house and there were fields and barns. The Americans did send in sewing machines and truckloads of materials, but the people they sent in were all people from different camps and they were absolutely unmanageable. In a way you couldn't blame them; a lot of them were young people who had been in the camps as children and they were totally, totally demoralized. There was no authority, there were no laws, there were no morals. They were like animals. They would steal food from the kitchen - it was their kitchen but they stole anyway. There was no day and there was no night. They would run around naked, totally naked, in the house, and if you said something, they would say, "Well, if I could stand naked in front of a Gestapo man, I certainly can do it here." It was just impossible. You could forget about their learning a trade. They didn't want to do anything. They wanted Germans from the town to clean for them.

We also had a problem with some of the older people because they had lost their families, and we were a family. It put a terrible emotional strain on them. If I came outside with you, they would all run because they couldn't stand the sight of a child. It was all too fresh. We didn't stay there long, just a few weeks. We had one room, and most of the time I stayed in the room behind a locked door. Later, a few couples married, and they came to us to give the bride away but I don't know what happened to most of them. There was a psychiatrist assigned to the place and he said, "Look, the sooner you get out of here the better. It is not the place for you." Pepe also wanted to get out. It was nothing like what we expected. David went there with a lot of enthusiasm. He had sent

people to the hahsharas and now he had a chance to do the same thing. It was a big disappointment.

During this time, I went to Kassel to visit Sarah. It turned out that the Jew who ran the store in the labor camp in Kassel during the war was living in Kassel. He had secretly helped the Gestapo find all the hidden Jews and had survived. He was from Kassel and after the war he became a big macher in this little Jewish community.²¹⁵ The Jewish community center was where all the Jews gathered for information, for medical treatment, for food; you needed coupons to get food and the coupons were distributed there. Sarah had gone there to get assigned a room and when this man told her he was from Kassel she told him that her brother had been in a camp in Kassel, and did he know him? The man didn't say anything, but he gave her a very nice apartment and catered to her. When I came to Kassel, Benjamin and I went to the center to get some coal. This man hid in the back, and the next day a carload of coal arrived at the apartment from him. I didn't say anything at the time because everything was too fresh. Later I learned that he emigrated to the United States. He probably got worried because a lot of people started coming out and identifying people. I'm sure that he denounced a lot of people.

After a few days I went back to Gersfeld. On the way back from Kassel, I had to stand up in the train because there was nowhere to sit. The trains were working again, but it was very hard to get on. You almost had to crawl through the window, they were so crowded. There were conductors and engineers, but it wasn't very organized. There was no schedule, there were no tickets. You went to a station and you waited, and when the

²¹⁵ "Macher" is Yiddish and German for a doer, a dealer. A person who is active in community organizations or who has connections and can arrange things is a "macher." A big macher is a big shot. Rosten, Joys, 213.

train came you tried to get on it. The trip took several hours and I got a hemorrhage in my leg, so when I reached home, I couldn't walk. I was pregnant with Bernie and I had to stay in bed. David and I decided that we could not stay in Gersfeld any longer. David talked with the UNRRA; they told him that they were opening an office in Fulda and he could work for them there. There was a resort, a spa, outside Fulda with a big hotel where all the Nazi bigwigs used to stay. They had special water there for the liver or stomach. The UNRRA was going to make it into a camp for Jewish DPs. There was also a camp at Gerolzhofen. They would give us an apartment in Fulda.

At that time a DP needed a special passport to live outside of a DP camp. Things had begun to get a little bit tense. The Americans lifted the anti-fraternization laws so the American soldiers could fraternize with the Germans. The Americans were trying to make peace with the Germans, and they didn't want people looting and stealing, so they figured it was better to keep the DPs in camps. The DPs began to feel that they were shut up in camps again. They didn't put barbed wire around, but you had to stay in camp and you needed a pass if you wanted to leave. It was very regimented.²¹⁶ The UNRRA gave

²¹⁶ Ida seems to be collapsing several months into a shorter period here. At this point, sometime before the end of October 1945, the Americans were not yet interested in making friends with Germany or restoring it to health. That came later, when the Allies became aware of Stalin's designs on Eastern Europe. In the first months after the war, the DPs were generally poorly treated because the military, which was in charge of them, was ill-equipped to deal with them. Many of the officers and soldiers had little understanding of or sympathy for their plight and were overwhelmed by the work of handling so many people. They wanted order and discipline, so they put the DPs in assembly centers surrounded by barbed-wire and required them to have passes to leave. Some centers were even under the surveillance of German armed guards. Dinnerstein, *America*, 14-16. Some DPs lived outside the assembly centers but housing was hard to find, both because of war damage and because the Germans tried to keep vacancies for themselves.

Ida's contention that the DPs were put into camps to keep them from looting and stealing is difficult to substantiate, as reports on the DP crime rate differed. Some instances of looting and theft did occur in the months after the war's end, but later, when the situation stabilized, most DP crimes were minor infractions. *Idem*, 51-52.

One might also note that living in the assembly centers or camps protected the DPs from a sometimes hostile populace that resented their presence and sometimes accused them of crimes

us an apartment in Fulda.²¹⁷ It used to belong to a Jewish doctor, and then a Nazi took it over. When the Americans took it over, they divided it in half. We were supposed to get four rooms and another family was supposed to get four rooms. It was pretty badly damaged because a bomb had hit the building next door. The windows were gone and some walls were cracked.

In the meantime, you were getting to know us. When we first took you from Mrs. Hoffman, you didn't know that we were your mother and father. You recognized us because the last few months of the war we visited you on Sunday, but you weren't old enough to know who we were. When we took you you were about nineteen months old. You called her mother, you cried all night, you wouldn't sleep. Maybe it was because of the bombs, the artillery, maybe it was because we were almost strangers. Anyway, gradually you got to know us but it took a while before you started calling us mother and father. We were constantly together - it wasn't like we went to work and came home at night - and that sped up the process. We had gotten a lot of toys for you and we played with you all day.

The Americans sent people to fix the apartment - they put the windows in and all that. It didn't take long. When they split the apartment, everything was in it, furniture, dishes, everything. But by the time we moved in a day or two later, there wasn't much left. The Germans who had the other half of the apartment - the Werners - had taken everything they could. They put in a broken table, a couple of broken chairs, some beds

unjustifiably.

²¹⁷ Ida and David were in Wildflecken until October 24, 1945. From then until the end of May 1949, except for the brief period at Gersfeld, they lived in Fulda. David worked for the UNRRA and its successor organization IRO the entire time. The UNRRA hired many DPs to help run the DP camps, as the UNRRA teams were too small to handle the large numbers of people in the camps. Work also improved

and a little iron stove. It was cold and the central heat was cut off, so you burned coal and wood in the iron stove. You had to have a stove in every room because the heat did not circulate. We only had one stove and we kept it in the bedroom where I lay in bed and you played on the floor. It was really a bad situation.

The Werners were real winners. There was a grandmother, two old maiden aunts, Frau Werner, and her married daughter who had a little daughter Christie about ten or eleven years old. They owned a beauty parlor. The man was a barber and the daughter ran the beauty parlor. He could not afford this apartment, but when he became a Nazi the Germans gave it to him. They had a maid named Sophie, a really nice girl from a village - the Nazis would assign German girls from villages to work in households - but they treated her like a dog.

One day shortly after we moved in, Sophie came to our apartment and told me she didn't want to work for the Werners anymore. Since the Nazi regime had ended, her obligation had finished, but she didn't want to go back home. She said she liked you very much and if I was willing she would work for me and take care of you. I agreed and she was wonderful. She was a very sweet girl. We used to laugh because if you sent her out on an errand she always put on her hat. She was from the country, and she thought that in the city she should always wear a hat. She took care of me, and she played with you. Her folks lived in the country, and when they came in to visit they would bring me a couple of onions or tomatoes or fresh eggs. It was wonderful because at that time we had a lot of food, but very little fresh food. We had a lot of coffee and dried eggs and canned peaches.

We would bake a lot of cakes, very heavy cakes, because we used to get flour and margarine and sugar, and I was getting very heavy. I started getting out of bed a little bit, and Mrs. Werner made me some dresses. But from one fitting to the other I was bigger. It was unreal. In the meantime Mrs. Werner got very friendly with you too. She would take you into her sewing room - she had a sewing room attached to the apartment where she had about three or four girls sewing - and dress you up. They would put you on a table like a doll and fit you with dresses. Mrs. Werner made clothes for the fancy people in Fulda. She was the head of the dressmaker guild in the city. She had pieces of material left over from the years of sewing and she would make dresses for you. Silk and georgette dresses. You were always dressed up with a fancy little apron on top. When we came to New York you had about fifty dresses, all fancy, none of them washable, none of them really practical. That was her atonement for what the Germans did; she thought she would show that she loved a Jewish child and make dresses for her. She would make clothes for me too, because I would get up once in a while for a Jewish wedding, to give the bride away. But my leg wasn't getting any better.

David worked in the Fulda office for UNRRA. First the UNRRA sent him and all the people they hired to Garmisch-Partenkirchen for four weeks to learn about camping, nutrition, figuring portions. When he came back, he worked in their office on Lindenstrasse. They gave him a car with a chauffeur, a black Mercedes that belonged to some Nazi, and he would visit the Jewish camps in the area. So we lived in Fulda in this apartment at 16 Heinrichstrasse, and I lay in bed, and Sophie took care of us. She worked holidays, Saturdays and Sundays. In the morning she would clean and then she would

take you to the Schlossgarten.²¹⁸ In the afternoon she would fix dinner. She was really an angel. If you needed fresh food, her father and mother would bring it, and I would give them coffee or margarine. We also got Sophie a room for herself. In a German apartment house, the maids' rooms are on the top floor, and they are connected with the apartment below by a bell. Because David was in the UNRRA and we were Jews, we were treated better than the Germans.²¹⁹ So we were able to get a room for her from the owner of the house. This made her very happy. She had a fiancé who was discharged from the army - he got sick there - and he would go up and visit her in the evenings. I would bake a cake and give her half and coffee. At that time the Americans discovered a cache of champagne bottles somewhere, so they gave every DP a bottle of champagne each day. Children too. We didn't drink much, so we accumulated a lot of champagne. People would trade with it. Sometimes for dinner we would open a bottle and drink a little bit; the rest we gave her so she would have cake and champagne. Her fiancé soon regained his health, and she was very happy.

²¹⁸ Fulda has a famous eighteenth century castle (schloss) and its garden is a public park.

²¹⁹ Ida and David may have been treated better than the Germans because David worked for UNRRA, rather than because they were Jews. It is true that the Allies allotted the DPs more food than the Germans; at one point the calorie level was officially set at 1550 per day for Germans, 2000 for regular DPs, and 2400 for persecuted people like Jews. Wyman, *DP*, 168. However, the calorie level did not necessarily mean the diet was good. In the months immediately following liberation, many DPs lived mainly on bread and coffee. Moreover, many Germans were able to supplement their diet with farm products to which the DPs lacked access. The DPs also lived in crowded quarters, sometimes in housing built for forced laborers, sometimes in former concentration camps. Reports of the grim conditions in the camps prompted President Truman to send an envoy, Earl Harrison, to investigate. Harrison's report, issued August 1945, was scathing. After criticizing the diet, housing, and general treatment of the DPs, he concluded "we appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them except that we do not exterminate them." President Truman immediately ordered General Eisenhower to improve the situation. Eisenhower commandeered some German homes to house the DPs, increased their rations, and provided some recreational facilities. Dinnerstein, *America*, 40-45; Sachar, *Redemption*, 164. Unfortunately, Eisenhower's orders were not followed by all his subordinates. Dinnerstein, *America*, 49.

She was a lifesaver because I was confined to bed most of the pregnancy. The last few weeks I didn't even move. A special doctor was ordered to be there when the baby was born because they feared that I could have a leg problem and never walk again. It was very bad. At that time German doctors were very reluctant to treat Jews because they were afraid that if something went wrong, if a medicine didn't work, they would be accused of sabotage. And Bernie was the first child to be born in Fulda after the war.²²⁰ There was a private clinic in Fulda with about twelve beds, run by a Dr. Schneider. It was on a mountain, the Frauenberg, in the garden of the villa where he lived, and before the war only the upper crust went there. So David and the other Jews in Fulda decided that the only place to have the baby was Dr. Schneider's clinic. Schneider wasn't Jewish but they figured he was a good doctor. David told him the situation, and Dr. Schneider said he would take care of the birth, and he would have a doctor stand by for the leg. I had another doctor taking care of the leg. He would come every day and look at it and brush it and give me some bark to drink, bitter bark which didn't help. The moment I stood up the veins would get big and the leg would get numb. This doctor kept telling me the leg swelled because the baby was very big and because I was lying in bed and eating so much after not eating so many years. All we had was white bread and cakes and pudding and peaches in heavy syrup, heavy things like that.

Bernie was born in February 1946. He came in the middle of the night, and I almost lost him. I delivered him with my shoes on, with my coat on, in the clinic waiting room, because by the time they woke up the chauffeur and got me to the clinic, the water

²²⁰ Ida probably means that Bernie was the first Jewish child born in Fulda after the war. He was born on February 26.

had broken in the car. When I went up the walk to the villa the nurses were standing at the door, and they put me on a rolling stretcher. I remember one of them saying, "Oh, my God, my God, my God, the child is here". They threw something on me, and they pushed the stretcher into the corner so the walls would keep it from rolling. There was a clock in the waiting room and when I came through the door, I looked at it. When I woke up, it was seven minutes later. They had a tub of hot water, and they were washing Bernie. The doctor was in his pajamas. They took me up to a very elegant bedroom. I remember that at about nine a.m. the doctor came in dressed in a morning coat. He congratulated me and apologized for wearing pajamas earlier but it was the middle of the night.

Then we had to have a bris.²²¹ After the war there was a small community of about fifty Jews in Fulda. Most of them were originally from Poland. There was only one person originally from Fulda who survived, a Mrs. Broner. She and her husband were Bernie's godparents. She was a Hebrew teacher, a very refined, very religious woman. Her birthday was the same day as mine, and we became very friendly. I liked her very much. She lost her family in the war and married a man from Poland who used to be a sign painter. The Germans had turned the Schildeckstrasse synagogue into a warehouse during the war, so he took on the job of cleaning and painting it. The synagogue had a Torah, but he thought there should be two lions holding it, so he painted two lions where the ark was. It became a joke because no one knew they were lions. In Poland there was a soap factory whose trademark was a lion. He remembered the wrapping paper and he tried to copy it but it looked like something which nature hadn't

²²¹ "Bris" or "brith" means covenant in Hebrew, but the term usually refers to the circumcision ceremony performed on the eighth day of a Jewish male's life. Rosten, *Jays*, 50. The circumcision is a reminder of the covenant between God and the Jewish people.

yet created. Anyway, it was decided that since the synagogue had just been finished, we should have the bris there. It would be like a rededication. I was still in the hospital, because at that time you stayed in the hospital ten days, but all the women were baking and cooking because the whole Jewish community was coming to the bris. And Mr. Broner - who said all along that the baby was going to be a boy - went to Frankfurt and without telling us found a mohel and told the man to be on standby.²²² After Bernie's birth he brought this mohel to Fulda. They arranged Bernie's bris and came to the hospital and took Bernie and all his clothes. I got a lot of new clothes for him - in fact I got two layettes. The UNRRA had a standard layette for a baby, and there was an UNRRA officer, a Jewish girl from the States whose name was Sophie too, who was very friendly with us and brought us one as a gift. The only thing we could use were the diapers and the blankets because Bernie was so big at birth he didn't fit any of the baby clothes. He weighed about thirteen pounds when he was born.

When we had the bris, a lot of young doctors came because they had never seen a circumcision. When the mohel brought Bernie back to my room, these doctors came up to the room and opened the diaper. They saw some blood - they don't put a bandage on after circumcision - so they got very scared. One doctor's father, an old man who was a professor of medicine at Heidelberg University, was visiting, and the doctor called him to the hospital. They took Bernie to the surgical room, sterilized the wound, bandaged him and then brought him back. There was nothing wrong with the circumcision but there was a lot of blood in the diaper and it worried them. Also there

²²² "Mohel" is the Hebrew name for a person trained to perform circumcisions. Rosten, Joys, 51.

were not too many mohels at that time, and we weren't really sure if he was good or bad. Anyway, everything was fine and two days later we went back home.

To everyone's great surprise, my leg straightened out almost miraculously. All the dire things they said might happen to the leg did not happen. The swelling went away, and I could walk. So we started thinking about what to do next. People were getting more concerned everyday. Some people opened little stores and some people started playing on the black market and smuggling things into the Russian zone. We weren't hungry any more, we had a roof over our heads, but the pressures of normal life were building up. What to do, where to go? We were all young people with small children. None of us really wanted to stay in Germany, but it turned out that there was nowhere to go. The Jewish Poles did not want to go home, partly because of the Russians and partly because of the unfriendly signals towards Jews which were coming out of Poland.²²³ We began to feel that we had lived through the whole war and suffered and now there was no place to go, especially for Jews. A lot of countries were taking in other people, but not Jews. Australia and Canada sent commissions to pick up people from the DP camps. They needed people because they were sparsely populated, but all they wanted were strong people to work on farms.²²⁴ The Jews were generally not farm

²²³ As stated in footnote 212 above, many Poles who originally intended to return to Poland changed their mind when they saw that Poland was under Soviet domination. Polish Jews were also discouraged from returning by reports of post-war pogroms that suggested to them that pre-war anti-Semitism was still alive and well in Poland. The pogrom in Kielce on July 4, 1946, in which forty-two Jews were killed, made an especially strong impression. Biskupski, *History*, 131. Sixteen thousand Jews left Poland that month, followed by 23,000 in August and 23,000 in September. Wyman, *DP*, 144. Originally the Polish government tried to discourage Jews from emigrating and they had to smuggle themselves out of the country, but the Kielce pogrom convinced officials that the population was still hostile to Jews and the government then began to cooperate with the Haganah in moving them out of the country. Sachar, *Redemption*, 149, 154.

²²⁴ Post-war labor shortages quickly replaced concerns that high unemployment would follow the

workers, and the Jews had suffered the most in the war. Even after they had gained some weight and looked fairly healthy, they really didn't have the strength to become farm workers. The commissions were very strict, and there was no way most Jews could pass the screenings. They used to say that they made people lift hundred kilo sacks of grain to see if they were strong enough. So a lot of Poles and Latvians went. We resented this greatly because a lot of Latvians were among the S.S. who killed the Jews.²²⁵ And a lot of them smuggled themselves into the DP camps. Even Germans got into the DP camps. The commissions picked all of these big strong men when we knew what they did in the war.

In 1946 a Polish Jew, a Dr. Gringauz, organized the first Congress of Liberated Jews.²²⁶ The Congress met in Munich and David was a delegate. This Congress declared

war's end and led some countries to open their doors to the DPs. However, access was motivated by pragmatism, not humanitarianism. The young and the strong were accepted; the old, the weak, the unhealthy were rejected. Many of the national commissions that visited the camps in search of workers looked for agricultural and industrial workers; others looked for specific nationalities. Belgium, the first country to request a large group of immigrants, wanted coal miners; Canada came in 1947 to recruit lumberjacks, farmers, miners and railroad workers. Australia selected blond, blue-eyed DPs who would blend in with the population. Wyman, DP, 188-192.

Rabbi Philip Bernstein, President Truman's advisor on Jewish Affairs, found that countries were generally willing to take in very small numbers of DPs and wanted people skilled in forestry, mining, and farming, all areas which demanded physical strength and in which few Jewish DPs had any experience. Sachar, Redemption, 171.

²²⁵ In the DP camps there were many Poles, Ukrainians, Yugoslavians, Russians and Balts who did not want to go home. Some had left their homelands to escape communist rule and did not want to return while their country was still under Communist control. Others had gone to Germany voluntarily, to work in its factories or to fight in its army, and were afraid to go back because they feared punishment for collaboration. Among the Poles, the Ukrainians, and the Balts especially there were many who had collaborated with the Nazis in tormenting and killing Jews. Hilberg noted that Nazis were "most successful" in recruiting locals to help round up and shoot Jews in the Baltic countries and in the Ukraine. Hilberg, Destruction, 122. Dr. Abraham Duker, a member of the American trial team at Nuremberg, accused the Balts and the Ukrainians of being "especially egregious collaborationists." Dinnerstein, America, 23. Ironically, many of the officials who visited the camps were favorably impressed by the Balts and Ukrainians and praised their cleanliness, industriousness, and energy. Idem, 21.

²²⁶ When the DP camps were first established, the DPs were organized by nationality. The Allies refused to create separate camps for Jews, contending that disparate treatment would constitute a continuation of Hitler's racial policies. In practice this meant that Jewish concentration camp survivors

that it was very sad that all the murderers who were in the DP camps - the Poles, the Ukrainians - were all being accepted with open arms, but the Jews, nobody wanted the remnants. Why did no one want the Jews? First, they didn't think the Jews were physically well. Second, they didn't want to create Jewish questions, anti-Semitism and all. The Congress decided that all the Jews in Germany should declare themselves stateless as a protest to the world that no one wanted to accept them. We didn't have a state, since we had renounced our Polish citizenship, and no one wanted us, so we were not citizens of anything. We were just lost souls who hung around in DP camps, stateless. There were a lot of organizations and associations, fighting and protesting. Nobody listened to us, but we kept on. We were very political, very active. There were also a lot of newspapers. Every camp had a newspaper. We didn't have Hebrew letters, so we used Polish letters, but the words were Yiddish. We kept up on the news.²²⁷

All over Germany denazification programs were going on. There were all kinds of court proceedings at that time but we already saw that not much would happen. The

from enemy countries like Germany were classified as enemies, while Jewish survivors from occupied countries like Poland were sometimes lodged with compatriots who were Nazi collaborators. Only after the Harrison report appeared in August 1945 and called attention to the particular plight of the Jewish survivors did the military acknowledge their special situation and establish separate camps for them. Dinnerstein, *America*, 13, 44. Once they regained some of their strength, they became quite active, helping run their camps, organizing programs, publishing newspapers. They held a number of conferences. One met in July 1945 at St. Ottilien camp near Munich; another was held in January 1946 in Munich. Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. "Displaced Persons." I am not sure which one she is recalling. Dr. Samuel Gringauz was head of the Jewish DPs in the Landsberg camp, site of a Zionist convention in October 1945. Wyman, *DP*, 138.

²²⁷ To counter listlessness, apathy, and despair, the UNRRA encouraged the DPs to set up committees to govern the camps. These committees organized activities and dealt with the UNRRA officials and military authorities. Wyman, *DP*, 117. The DPs organized cultural performances, often displaying their national culture, and athletic activities as well as adult education courses and vocational training programs. Different nationalities published their own newspapers; the *Landsberger Lager-Caytung*, a semi-weekly published in Yiddish, circulated in the American Zone's Jewish camps and at the Landsberg DP camp. Idem, 120-121. Political parties and factions also emerged. Idem, 128.

Nuremberg trials were taking place too.²²⁸ But as far as the lower echelons, they all said the same thing - they didn't know, they had to save their skin, they really didn't mean it. In 1947 Herr Englert, the man we worked for in Obervolkach, was tried. We weren't even notified, but we found out because we wrote letters to learn the date. We wanted to testify against him. When his trial came up, we went and testified. We were the only foreign workers there - we didn't know where all the others went. I testified that he beat me and the others. There were even Germans who testified against him because he stepped on their toes when he was a big Nazi. The trial took a whole day; it was a tough experience to go through. The verdict was to be announced two or three days later, but we had to return to Fulda. We asked the editor of the local newspaper to send us the newspaper with the verdict because we wanted to know. David even left him some money for the paper. We never heard from him. We wrote him a letter and he never responded. So I am quite sure that nothing happened.

It was amazing, but within a year everything changed; there was almost a 360 degree turn around. Suddenly you realized that there was no place to go, nobody wanted you, there was no great future. David wasn't the black market type, but we knew a lot of

²²⁸ The Nuremberg trials took place from November 25, 1945 to October 1946 in Nuremberg's Palace of Justice. In the major trials the International Military Tribunal tried twenty-two top Nazi leaders. Sachar, Redemption, 115-116. Britain and Russia opposed the trials, but Roosevelt wanted "to punish those who had ordered or committed torture and murder unrelated to the prosecution of the war." *Idem*, 117. Defense attorneys said the defendants were only obeying superior orders. Prosecutors charged them with crimes against humanity to avoid accusations that they were being tried for acts of war. *Idem*, 118, 119. In the first trial twelve German leaders were sentenced to death, including German Prime Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, the propagandist Julius Streicher, and Governor General Hans Frank. Gilbert, Second World War, 731. After the 1946 judgments, the Western Allies turned the prosecution of lesser officers over to the German courts. At first these courts tried to please the occupying powers; they convicted over five thousand people and sentenced five hundred to death. However, as time passed, the Germans felt less need to seek the favor of the occupiers, as their support was sought in the fight against Communism, and efforts to catch and try war criminals waned. Sachar, Redemption, 125.

people who made money in the black market.²²⁹ But even for them there was no future. People were sitting in the DP camps getting depressed and disgusted. A lot of young people married, and we used to get together and have little dinners and meetings. People celebrated all kinds of anniversaries and gave all kinds of eulogies and here they dug up some dirt and there they put a little stone memorial but there was always a funereal mood. We weren't really happy people. Perhaps we should have been dancing in the streets, considering the past, but the future looked very, very bleak. It was really bad, especially in the DP camps.²³⁰

Then, in 1948 they established Israel.²³¹ The Haganah had delegates, messengers, who would go into the camps and look up the young people and tell them they wanted to smuggle them into Israel.²³² I don't know exactly how many but there were a good many

²²⁹ Black market trading was widely practiced by both DPs and occupying troops. Cigarettes were a favorite medium of exchange. DPs traded them for food, clothes, and bedding, soldiers for a variety of goods. Wyman, *DP*, 116; Dinnerstein, *America*, 50. In November 1946 the UNRRA director declared that DPs caught trafficking in the black market would lose their DP status and be expelled from the camps. It is not clear whether this order was enforced. Wyman, *DP*, 116. Despite occasional military raids, efforts to stop black market trading by DPs were generally unsuccessful. Dinnerstein, *America*, 50.

²³⁰ Many DPs were depressed and listless. Jewish DPs especially were described as fatigued, suspicious and emotionally fragile. Wyman, *DP*, 133. Considering what they had lived through, their mental and physical state should not have been surprising, but the soldiers were not sympathetic. Middle-aged DPs with family responsibilities were generally more dispirited than the young or the old, and their depression deepened as their stay in the camps lengthened. Idem, 108. Their spirits were not lifted when the national commissions that came to the camps to recruit workers showed a clear preference for strong young DPs without dependents.

Change in the world political climate also affected the DPs. As the war-time alliance broke down and Stalin took control of Eastern Europe, the Western Allies decided they needed a strong Germany on their side to fight the Communist enemy. Many of the military charged with rebuilding Germany considered DPs a nuisance, an impediment to gaining German friendship, and treated them rudely and uncompassionately. In 1946 the military actually asked twice to close the DP centers, but President Truman refused. Dinnerstein, *America*, 53-54.

²³¹ The U.N. General Assembly officially approved the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish, on November 29, 1947. Smith, *Palestine*, 195. Israel proclaimed its statehood on May 14, 1948, the day the British Mandate for Palestine ended. Idem, 200.

²³² "Haganah is the Hebrew word for "defense." The Haganah was a Jewish defense force

of them. None of them stayed long. They would come, stay a day or two and leave because they were afraid their faces would become known. David got involved, not in the Haganah, but with the Zionists, trying to organize things. About that time, Motek Huberman showed up and told us about a relative in Alberta, Canada, who was my grandfather's youngest brother. Motek said that he had gotten in touch with him and that he was very well off. He had a big clothing store and a cold storage building for furs. Motek said maybe if we wrote to him he could get us papers to come to Canada as relatives - outside the Canadian commission which looked only for farmers.²³³ To the United States you couldn't go because the quotas were restrictive - you had to wait a long time.²³⁴ People tried to get in as rabbis because there were quota easements for religious leaders. The Hungarian Jews grew beards; they thought that in the United States people didn't know much Hebrew so they could pass as rabbis. People got letters which were

established after the first Arab attack on Jewish settlers in 1921, but it also helped organize the illegal immigration of DPs from Europe to Palestine at the end of World War II. H. Sachar, *Course*, 379, 467. In May 1939 the British issued a White Paper restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine to 15,000 annually. Zionist leaders were shocked by what they considered a reversal of earlier British declarations supporting the establishment of a Jewish homeland, but they obviously had no choice but to support the Allies against Hitler. When the war ended they hoped that Great Britain would lift the restrictions, but the new Labor government refused. The Jewish Agency then sent Haganah agents to Europe in an elaborate campaign to get as many DPs as possible out of Europe into Palestine. These agents first smuggled many Jews out of Eastern Europe and into the DP camps in the British and American zones of Germany. From the camps, they transported DPs to Mediterranean ports, loaded them on ships, and sent them on to Palestine. Once there, they had to make it past the British boats blockading the coast and British troops guarding the shore. "The majority of the DPs failed to make it. Of sixty-three ships that sailed clandestinely for Palestine between April 1945 and January 1948, fifty-eight were intercepted by the British; of twenty-five thousand DPs who crowded into the ships, hardly more than five thousand gained entrance into Palestine." *Idem*, 469. Most of these illegal immigrants were detained on Cyprus and entered Palestine when the state of Israel was created in May 1948.

²³³ On November 7, 1946, Prime Minister MacKenzie King issued an emergency order permitting Canadians to sponsor relatives for immigration into Canada. Wyman, *DP*, 190.

²³⁴ See footnote 50 above. Under the national origins quota system, a maximum of 6524 immigrants from Poland could enter each year. *Ibid.*, 186.

purportedly from families and they would pretend their relatives were inviting them. People tried all kinds of schemes.

Whole families of Russians started showing up in the camps. They had not been in German camps. They had been in Russia during the war and survived in Siberia, or somewhere. To get the privileges, they claimed that they had been in Germany. There were quota easements for children too. One couple with two children registered the children as orphans and the HIAS took the two children to the United States because they were picking up Jewish orphans. Afterwards the parents tried to get in on the pretext that they had children there. They said they hadn't known they were alive. People made up all kinds of stories.

One day a special delegation from Canadian unions showed up in the American zone. Many of the delegates were Jews who wanted to sponsor a group of Jews to come to Canada to work in factories. They looked for tailors and dressmakers, not farmers. The group had a special dispensation from the Canadian government because the commission took mostly non-Jews. They set up an office in some little city in the American zone. When the news got around, we decided that I should go and pose as a dressmaker to get into Canada. About twenty-five people from Fulda went. None of us was really a tailor, but we thought we would try. When we got there, we learned that we had to pass a test to show that we could sew. Some of the men had been told that tailors keep the material in their lap when they sew, so some of them sewed the material onto their pants. It was hilarious. We stayed in this town about four days taking tests, but nothing happened. Later we found out that they took only a very limited number of people. We all stayed in a big dormitory. I was the only woman, so they were all very

polite to me wherever we went. In a way it was funny, but it was also sad. The Canadians told me that they could only take the head of the family; they hadn't even counted on a woman being there. So it didn't work out.²³⁵

At about this time, we wrote to the relative in Canada. He wrote back saying he would do whatever he could, but he didn't know exactly what at that moment. He started sending more letters. He said that the only way we could come was as farmers, but we could come outside the commission. He knew some people who had farms and one of them might sponsor us. When we came we wouldn't really have to be farm workers but we would have to live on a farm for a year. After that he might be able to get us out to live in the city. The Canadian government was very strict but officials couldn't come every day to check if you were actually working in the fields. As long as you were on the farm you were all right. But it would take time.

In Fulda we stayed close to the other Jews. We attracted a lot of single people because we were the only family; they would hang around our house because most of them lived in single rooms. At holidays we would all eat together. It was really a sad life. Many of them were people who had lost everybody. We had a friend named Herman who had lost a leg in Buchenwald.²³⁶ He couldn't wear an artificial leg. The American hospitals kept giving him artificial legs - he had about twenty of them in his

²³⁵ Hulme mentions this episode in her book, noting that when the Canadians offered to accept tailors, "everyone who had ever sewed on a pants' button was a master tailor." The DPs were so eager to leave Germany they tried to qualify for any job offered. Unfortunately, Canada's quota for tailors was 160 for the whole U.S. zone. Hulme, *Wild Place*, 199.

²³⁶ Buchenwald was a concentration camp built near Weimar, Germany, in July 1937. Initially it was used to imprison opponents of the Nazis, Jews, homosexuals and Jehovah's Witnesses. Later people from many occupied countries were sent there. When the camp was liberated on April 11, 1945, ninety-five percent of the inmates were not Germans. Although not a death camp, 50,000 of the 250,000 prisoners confined in Buchenwald between 1937 and 1945 died there of overwork, hunger, medical experiments and

room - but somehow he couldn't wear them. He was a nice man and he would hang out in our apartment all day long.

About six months after I visited Sarah in Kassel, she had some visitors from Paris. They told her that Salka was alive, but they didn't know about Salka's husband Herschel.²³⁷ Sarah also found out that Herschel had left a whole warehouse full of furniture and materials - he was in the interior decorating business - and nobody had even touched the lock. It was supposedly worth a fortune.

When Salka moved to Paris from Poland, she and Herschel both worked, and they sent their son Michel to stay with a farm family in the country. Salka and Herschel used to visit him on holidays and on weekends. When the war broke out, this family kept him. By that time he was about eighteen or nineteen years old. He went to medical school and studied medicine all during the war in the country. When the war ended, he was almost finished with his medical studies - he had about a year to go. The government drafted medical students to help out in the camps, to vaccinate people and to help with the sick. Michel volunteered, and he was sent to a big camp for Jews near Strasbourg. There he met the girl he fell in love with and married - she was from Strasbourg.

Anyway, when Salka found out that David and Sarah were alive, she wanted them to come to Paris and help her run this interior decorating business. But there were several reasons we didn't want to go. First of all I was pregnant with Bernie - this was before Bernie was born. Second, David didn't know any French. Third, he didn't know anything about the interior decorating business and neither did I. We thought it would be

violence. Buchenwald Memorial information booklet.

²³⁷ Salka was Sarah's and David's sister. She moved to Paris with her husband Herschel before the war. Herschel was caught in the 1942 round-up of Jews in Paris and sent via Drancy to Auschwitz,

very difficult, so we decided not to go. Sarah and Benjamin went. They stayed with Salka a very short time, but they got into each other's hair and they moved out. They didn't have any money, so they had a very hard time, but there were a lot of people from Siedlce in Paris, so Benjamin went to someone he knew, and the man taught him how to make knit sweaters. That was how they made their living until they went to Israel in 1949.

Toward the end of the war the Russians wanted the Poles to help them fight so they organized a Polish army. To get Poles to sign up for this army, the Russians agreed to free all the Polish citizens they had sent to Siberia and the camps. Once freed, the Poles started leaving Siberia and travelling south. When the war ended, they were in southern Russia. Russia gave them trains and said they could go anywhere they wanted. Many went back to Poland, but from Poland they smuggled themselves out to the American zone.²³⁸ Melech Feinsilber went to the American zone with his daughters; they thought they would go to the States. Everybody thought that once you were in the

where he died.

²³⁸ The Soviet Union sought Polish help less than two months after Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. In a military convention signed with General Wladyslaw Sikorski, head of the Polish government-in-exile on August 12, 1941, Stalin agreed to grant amnesty to all Poles interned in the Soviet Union, and to cancel the provisions of the Nazi-Soviet pact pertaining to Poland in exchange for a promise that Polish soldiers would form an army and fight with Russia against the Germans. Davies, *Heart*, 61. A Polish army was formed under General Wladyslaw Anders, and thousands of Polish deportees were allowed to leave Siberia. *Idem*, 76. Many went to Iran; some, like our relatives, went to Uzbekistan, and then when the war ended, to Palestine. See footnote 114 above. Davies does not indicate whether any Poles returned to Poland immediately; it seems highly probable that Jews did not. However, many did return to Poland when the war ended; estimates of the number of Jews repatriated to Poland from the Soviet Union range from 130,000 to 180,000. Wyman, *DP*, 142; Dawidowicz, *War*, 397. After the Kielce pogrom, many of these same Jews left Poland, either alone or assisted by Haganah agents, for the DP camps in Germany, most hoping eventually to make it to Palestine. The Jewish population under UNRRA's care increased from 18,361 in December 1945 to 97,333 in December 1946; when the IRO took over the camps in June 1947 Jews numbered 167,529. Of this number, the largest contingent, 122,313, came from Poland. Wyman, *DP*, 149.

American zone, you could get on a ship and go to the States.²³⁹ David's sister Leah and her children had been in Siberia but they wound up in Italy; they were going to go through Italy to Israel. Matla, Leah's daughter, worked in the Haganah and lived in a villa outside of Florence. She was very well known after the war because the villa was a night stop. All the people smuggled by the Haganah from the Russian and British zones to Israel went through Italian ports because the Haganah had ships there.²⁴⁰ From those ports, it was only a short trip through the Mediterranean to Israel. The smuggled people would spend the night at the villa before they got on the ships. Matla met her husband Yitzchak there; he was also an activist. Leah's sons Baruch and Avigdor were also with the Haganah. The third son, Lazar, took the literary route. He always liked writing and literature, so when they started publishing a Jewish newspaper in Paris, he went there and got involved. He lived with a group of other men who also worked on the paper.

In 1948, when Sarah learned that Leah was in Israel, she decided she wanted to go there. At that time Benjamin didn't want to go. He came to Germany to buy machinery to take to Israel; Germany had a lot of factories full of machines which weren't being used that it was eager to sell. He came to visit us and stayed about a week. He needed permission to come, and I still have his permit. He wanted to open a factory in Israel but he couldn't decide if he wanted knitting machinery or woodworking machinery. Finally he decided that he preferred woodworking to knitting because he knew more about wood and because Israel's climate wasn't much for sweaters. So David helped him buy some

²³⁹ Melech Feinsilber was the husband of David's sister Chana. She died in Siberia but Melech and their daughters survived.

²⁴⁰ The Haganah smuggled Jews out of the American and British zones; I do not know if they also operated in the Russian zone. Haganah agents engaged ships in French and Yugoslavian ports as well as

woodworking machines. He had big crates built and loaded the machinery and sent it to Israel. He never used it there. Everyone thought Israel would need factories so everyone who went to Israel brought machinery even if he didn't know how to work with it. Israel never used the machines. The only things that people used were the big crates. They lived in them. They put them on the ground and they were like a ready-made house. About ten years later Benjamin started a little factory where he made crates for oranges, but a year after he started it, plastic crates were invented so it came to nothing.

In the meantime, in 1948, Sarah got pregnant with Yael.²⁴¹ She and Benjamin left for Israel in 1949, at about the same time we went to the U.S. Yael was about six or seven months old - she was called Jeanette at that time. When they got to Israel a group of people from Siedlce who were Benjamin's age took him in as a partner in their cigarette factory and he immediately bought an apartment there. Salka stayed alone in Paris. I don't know what she did with the goods in the warehouse, she must have sold them. Melech and his two girls also went to Israel. Before they left, they came to visit us in Fulda. We bought them clothes and shoes and all kinds of things. One of them was growing fond of the boy she later married. He was a dentist.

One afternoon, when I was coming home from town, I saw our friend Herman hanging out of our window. When he saw me, he started waving back to the room, and I realized that something was up. When I got upstairs, Wit was there. By then I had found out from the Red Cross that he was alive. I knew that he had married Rena and that he was lieutenant-governor of a province in Poland called Pomerania. He lived in Stettin.

Italian ports.

²⁴¹ Ida's recollection is faulty here, as Yael was born on November 7, 1947. She was about twenty months old when her family arrived in Israel on July 26, 1949.

Stettin was in Germany but after the war it became part of Poland.²⁴² Now all of a sudden he was here. After so many years we had some reunion.

He told us that he was still using the name Dunnillowicz; he never went back to Tenenbaum. He told us that when he went to Germany in 1942, he was sent to Stettin. He got assigned to work in a big department store which sold shoes. Because he had to deliver packages, he had a pass to move around Stettin, so he got in touch with the underground and became a messenger. When the war ended, he knew Stettin and the Poles in the underground knew him. A lot of the underground people became big shots, and he worked his way up. He was a high school graduate so he knew more than some other people who were less educated. A lot of foreign correspondents came to Poland at that time to do articles for newspapers and magazines. He spoke Russian and German, so he was assigned to take them around. He became lieutenant-governor of the whole province. The governor was a man who came from Russia. He was an older man, whom Wit suspected of being Jewish, although the man never said that he was. Wit thought he was Jewish because he brought his mother with him, and the mother looked like an old Jewish woman. Wit had a very good relationship with the governor, who treated him like a son.

One day Wit was driving down the street in Stettin and saw Rena. He recognized her because he knew her in school. Rena had been in Ravensbrück.²⁴³ When she was freed she and a few other girls went back to Poland. She was living in an apartment in

²⁴² At the end of World War II Poland's borders were moved west-ward. The Soviet Union kept most of pre-war eastern Poland, and Poland received the German territory east of the Oder and Neisse rivers, including Stettin, now Szczecin. Biskupski, *History*, 118, 124.

²⁴³ Ravensbrück was a slave labor camp north of Berlin and west of Stettin. It was liberated April

Stettin. He picked her up and took the girls out for some food. Eventually he and Rena got married. They were living in Stettin in a villa, with a guard. At the same time the Kielce pogrom broke out. It shook the world, not because so many people got killed, but because so few Polish Jews had survived the war and when a few of them returned to Poland, they immediately got killed.²⁴⁴ One of the men who got killed in the Kielce pogrom was a man from Siedlce who went to school with Wit. His name was Kowman Ozel. Wit said that when he realized that Kowman survived the German camps and the war and then got killed in a pogrom when he came back to Poland, he decided it was time to get out of Poland - even if he was a big shot and even if he was not a known Jew.

He could not stay in Poland, but he didn't know how to get out without revealing himself. Melech Feinsilber was still in Poland at that time and he also lived in Stettin. He wanted to open a club like a Jewish Community Center, but he needed permission from the governor. He got an audience with the lieutenant-governor to explain what Zionism was and why he should be allowed to open the club. Melech didn't know that Witold Dunnillowicz was David Tenenbaum whom he knew when he was a little boy in Siedlce. Melech sat in the waiting room until an aide came out and said the lieutenant-governor was ready to see him. He walked in and behind a big ornate desk under a big eagle sat David Tenenbaum. Wit knew whom he was going to see because he knew the name Feinsilber, but Melech did not know whom he was going to see. But he didn't bat an eye. Wit asked him to sit down and Melech sat down and explained what the Jews

30, 1945. Gilbert, Atlas, 229.

²⁴⁴ In the Kielce pogrom, July 4, 1946, forty-two Jewish survivors of the war were killed. Biskupski, History, 131. An estimated one thousand Jewish survivors were killed in Poland between the war's end and mid-1947. The continuing anti-Semitism led 100,000 Jews to flee Poland. Gilbert, Atlas, 240-1.

were, what the Zionists were, what he wanted. Naturally Wit gave him the permission. Later when Wit decided that he wanted to leave the only Jewish person he could contact was Melech. He got in touch with Melech, and Melech put him in touch with the Haganah.

One afternoon Wit went to see the Haganah man. When he told this man that he was Jewish and that he wanted to get out, he thought the man was going to have a heart attack. It wasn't only that Wit was Jewish but that Wit and Rena both had to be smuggled out of the country. It was no easy feat but they devised a plan. One night Wit and Rena had to dress up and make believe they were going to a party. They couldn't take anything - no suitcases, no packages, nothing. They had to walk out of their house, get in their car and drive to a certain place. When they got there, a truck was waiting. The Haganah people put them in the truck and pulled a tarpaulin over them. They rode all night and in the morning they were let out in the American zone in a place that was going to be a DP camp. There was nobody in it yet, just a crew, maybe ten people. Wit told the people he had a sister in Fulda so they let him come to Fulda. Rena stayed there. The next day was a holiday so we could not reach her. There was no telephone, there was nothing, so we rented a cab and Wit and Herman and I went to pick up Rena. Wit didn't know exactly where the place was, so we drove and drove. We finally found it. We brought Rena back to Fulda and they stayed with us. That was the end of the plan to go to Israel.

When they arrived they had an affidavit to come to the United States. Rena had an uncle in New Jersey who sent her the affidavit after the war. When he found out that she was alive, he wanted to adopt her - she was just about nineteen or twenty years old - and bring her to the United States, but before this was finalized she got married. He

could not adopt her anymore because she was married, so he sent an affidavit for her and Wit to come to the U.S. He knew there was a quota but he thought if he attached tickets, prepaid travel expenses, that would speed up the process. He did, but it didn't help. The day after Wit and Rena came to Fulda they went to Frankfurt to see the American Consul. We gave her a cotton dress because she still wore the black silk dress embroidered with rhinestones she had worn to leave Poland. All they brought with them she had in her pocketbook - a series of jade Buddhas and a nightgown. They went to Frankfurt convinced that within a week they would be in the United States. When they came back they were very depressed. Every affidavit had a number and the quotas went by numbers; they had to wait about thirteen years until their number came up.²⁴⁵ It was quite depressing. So they stayed with us. Wit was going crazy so he took a job with the UNRRA. At that time David was a mess officer and Wit became the supply officer. The mess officer dealt with food, and the supply officer dealt with all the other supplies. They moved to a little apartment across the street from us, and Wit kept busy trying to find a way to get out of Germany.

In the meantime a couple of men came to see David and offered him a position in the government in Israel. They wanted to have a government ready when the establishment of the country was announced. They were assigning different people to different positions. The men also said that the moment Israel announced statehood there would be a war. They knew it. Ben Gurion was a friend of the Yomtov family, and Moshe Sharett, who was later the foreign minister, was a good friend of Moshe Yomtov,

²⁴⁵ See footnote 234 above.

David's older brother.²⁴⁶ David and I had a long talk, and we decided that we had just made it through the war, and with two little children, getting into another war would really not make sense. The man who was in charge of the Exodus also came to us and wanted us to go.²⁴⁷ That was even before Israel was declared a state. About three or four people from Fulda went on the Exodus, but they were couples or single people. We thought that with two children we shouldn't go. Later the Exodus was caught. The people from Fulda wanted to come back to Fulda to get their things, but they wouldn't let them go. They wanted to have an international protest and if the people dispersed they couldn't have the group protest. Finally they let them come to get their clothes, but they had to go back to a camp where they kept them all. When you went on the Exodus, they did not let you take any luggage, just a few things, because they needed all the room for the people. It's not like the book describes it; the real story was a little different. Anyway, we decided not to go to Israel, and we continued our correspondence with Canada.

At this time Wit was still trying to get out of Germany and an opportunity came up in Holland. Holland had a lot of Jews who got killed in the war even though Queen Wilhelmina had tried to protect them. These Jews left a lot of wealth. A group of

²⁴⁶ David Ben-Gurion was Israel's first prime minister, serving from 1948-1953 and again from 1955 to 1963. Moshe Sharett was Israel's foreign minister from 1948 to 1955. See footnote 64 above.

²⁴⁷ The Exodus was one of the many boats that tried to evade the British blockade and bring DPs to Palestine after World War II. The Exodus sailed from Sete, France in July 1947 with 4500 refugees aboard. British ships discovered it and escorted it across the Mediterranean. Once in Palestine territorial waters, the British tried to board the boat, but they encountered stiff resistance from the DPs. The crew finally surrendered when the British threatened to sink the boat. Ernest Bevin, Britain's Foreign Secretary, decided to make an example of the Exodus and returned the refugees to Europe, rather than letting them stay in Cyprus, where intercepted refugees were usually detained. Sachar, Course, 469-70. The refugees were sent first to France, then to Germany, where they were held in a former camp. The Exodus affair highlighted the plight of the refugees, to the detriment of the British. Smith, Palestine, 193. The affair later

surviving Dutch Jews decided that they would repopulate Holland with surviving Jews from all over Europe. They decided the best way to do this was to bring a group of young couples to Amsterdam, give them the money left by the dead people and set them up in businesses. It was a very noble idea, and Queen Wilhelmina agreed, but she made one big mistake; she gave all the property to this committee. The committee looked for young couples without children and Wit and Rena were accepted, along with another couple from Fulda. There were fifty or seventy-five couples in all. When they got to Holland, the people on this committee had all the property, and they were not about to give anything to anybody. They kept these couples in barracks in a camp. A lot of them came back. Wit couldn't even get a decent job; he had to work as a laborer in a factory. Holland had laws that said if you were a foreigner, you could not get a business license alone - you had to co-own the business with a Dutch citizen. They lived in a place where water dripped from the walls, and Rena got very sick from the canals. They didn't have any money. It was terrible.

Before he left for Holland, Wit had received a letter from the governor of Pomerania. The governor wrote that Wit had made a mistake, but he hadn't done anything criminal, so he could come back to Poland. He didn't know if he could give Wit a job, but he thought Wit was best off in Poland. Wit kept in touch with him even when he was in Amsterdam. In Holland the situation was so bad that he started thinking about going back to Poland. One day as he was walking on the street, he met a man he knew from Poland who happened to work in the Polish Consulate in Amsterdam. When the man saw Wit, the way he looked, how dirty he was, he almost didn't recognize him. He

became the subject of a popular book by Leon Uris and of a movie.

asked Wit, "What are you doing here?" Wit told him what happened. The man said "I'll feel the situation out for you. If you still have your Polish passport give it to me, I will check it out with the Polish government and see what I can do for you." It didn't take long before this man called Wit and told him that he could go back to Poland, but that he would not get his position back. He would have to start on the bottom and work his way up. Also, he could not go to Stettin, he would have to go to Breslau, a city in the south of Poland. If he accepted these conditions, he could go back. Naturally, he did. He wrote me a letter saying that he would be passing through the American zone on a certain train, asking me to come to the station because he wanted to see me. I went, but I never saw him because the train schedule was wrong, and by the time my train got there, his train had gone.

So he went back to Poland. He stayed in Warsaw a short time and then he got a position in Breslau. He became the director of some factory. He worked himself up quickly, and he started traveling all over Europe to buy materials and machinery. From Poland he would write me letters that said everything was fine, but from outside he would write me the truth about the situation in Poland. He did very, very well. After a year or so he was transferred to Warsaw, and he became director of the soap, detergent, and cosmetic industry for all Poland. He had a nice house and a car, and he lived very well. He made friends in other countries who helped him when he left in 1968.²⁴⁸ Despite his good situation I didn't want to go back to Poland, and in the letters he wrote me from outside the country he never suggested that I come back. He knew that David was not

²⁴⁸ The year 1968 was marked by a political crisis and student demonstrations in Poland. Jews were blamed for the disturbances and many lost their jobs. Most of the Jews still in Poland, about 30,000, including Wit and his family, emigrated. Biskupski, *History*, 143-144.

like him. David couldn't carry on this sort of masquerade, pretending to be Polish for the whole world. There were a lot of Jews in the Polish government and there probably still are, but they all went under Polish names.

In the meantime we were still sitting in Fulda and looking for any avenue to leave. We went to the American Consulate, and we were told that with two children there was no way of getting out. The atmosphere got worse and worse. Every time somebody left, those who remained felt more hopeless. And financially we weren't doing so well. David got paid by the UNRRA, but it was not great pay. A lot of people began to have big cars and big homes and stores because they were involved in the black market. They wore big diamonds and fur coats - we weren't in that category at all.

One day in May 1949, David had to go to Frankfurt on business. Sarah was getting ready to go to Israel, Feinsilber's girls were going to Israel, and Leah was already in Israel, but we had decided against going there. David had realized that it was not the place to go. I think he wanted peace. He really wanted a place where he could live quietly. He was a very devoted father, and he really thought that it was not a good place to bring children. He would have liked to go and see it, but he did not think it was a good place to live. We were not the only ones who didn't want to go there. A lot of single young men went to fight, but a lot of older people, people with families, didn't want to go because they were very concerned about the situation there.²⁴⁹ At that time they often sang the song about the wide open spaces, and David used to sing it and say that is where

²⁴⁹ Ida is referring to the fighting taking place in Israel at this time. Passage of the U.N. resolution to partition Palestine on November 29, 1947, was followed by fierce fighting between Jews and Arabs. Smith, *Palestine*, 195-197. When Israel declared its statehood on May 14, 1948, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan attacked and two brief wars ensued, one lasting from mid-May to June 11, the other from July 6 to July 19. Idem, 200-201. Obviously, not all Jews wanted to go to Israel. An estimated 165,000

he wanted to go, where there were wide open spaces. A few times he said if he were single and alone he would have gone, but with a family, he really didn't think it was wise. He really wanted to go to Canada, and he wrote a lot of letters to the uncle in Canada, and this possibility seemed to be taking shape.

Then one day in May he went to Frankfurt on business, and when he came back that night he said to me, "I don't know what to say - something happened today and I don't know if it is serious or it's a joke." After he finished all of his business at UNRRA and HIAS - he used to go to HIAS too because he used to get Jewish magazines and cigarettes there - he passed by a room where a woman was sitting at a desk. She called him and asked him if he was a DP. He said yes. Then she asked "How would you like to go to the United States?" He just looked at her. She gave him a blank piece of paper and told him to write down his name and address and all the people in his family. She didn't even ask if he had family in the States. He thought it was a joke. After he wrote down the names she said, "Go home, you will hear from us."

At that time Congress had passed an act to let in 100,000 DPs above the quota, but they had to have sponsors. The sponsor was not responsible for the person having a job or anything because HIAS took the financial responsibility, but HIAS needed names to put on affidavits. Affidavits were given out in fifties and hundreds. Bulova Watch Company was our sponsor. They sponsored fifty families. HIAS tried to grab as many sponsors and places for Jews as they could because so many other people got in under other quotas. By 1948, most of the people left in the camps were Jews. They were the ones who suffered the most and they were the last to get out.

The next day, there was an explosion. Everybody was running to Frankfurt. It was announced on the radio that the United States Congress had passed the law. I think the day David signed up was the day the law was passed, perhaps it wasn't even passed yet but the HIAS was already getting people.²⁵⁰ Frankfurt was in a state of siege. People camped on the street to get in the HIAS office and sign up. We just looked at each other. It was a lucky strike. We couldn't believe it. He was asked to apply.

Within a week we got a letter from the consulate in Frankfurt asking us to come there with the children to pick up our visas to go to the United States. If you had told us that the sky was falling, that a hundred pounds of gold were going to fall at our feet, we would have believed it as much. We were dumbfounded - we didn't really believe it until everyone began rushing to Frankfurt. The day David came back from Frankfurt it really sounded like a joke. We drove down to Frankfurt and went to the consulate, and there we were, the number one affidavit on the list, the first family.²⁵¹ You had to take a test to see if you were healthy and not mentally retarded. We went to the doctor and he examined us and declared us fine. They gave us a piece of paper and everyone we saw stamped it. Finally, we went to a psychiatrist. He asked me what was fifteen times eighteen and I knew the answer because at the time we didn't use adding machines, so we still did

²⁵⁰ Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act on June 25, 1948. It permitted 202,000 DPs to enter the United States in the next two years. The DP Commission selected the candidates who then had to be approved by public health doctors and immigration service officers. Each prospective immigrant had to have an "assurance", a promise of a job and housing; voluntary agencies, often affiliated with different religious groups, solicited these assurances and then sent representatives to the camps to match up DPs with the offers. Thus, some DPs without relatives or friends in the United States were able to immigrate. Hulme, Wild Place, 223-8.

²⁵¹ We may have been first on some list, but we were not the first family to come to the United States under the Act. That honor went to the DPs who left Bremerhaven, Germany on the General Black on October 21, 1948. Wyman, DP, 199. By the spring of 1949, twenty thousand DPs had left Germany for the United States. Hulme, Wild Place, 237.

everything in our heads. He asked David something like twenty-three times twelve. He looked at the children and he gave us another stamp. When we came out, they asked if we could be ready in two weeks. We said sure, though we didn't believe we could.

We went back home and in two weeks we got a letter telling us to go to Bremerhaven to get on a certain ship. Sophie was going to get married, but she decided to wait until we left. She took us to the train to Bremerhaven. I left her all of the stuff we didn't take - some furniture, some pots and pans, clothes and food. She had to take it out of the apartment before we left, because we were afraid the Werners would not let her have it. The china, the crystal, some basic kitchen things like a meat grinder, we took, but the rest we left. I still have the list of things we took.

The whole thing took about a month from that day in May. It was so fast that our heads swam. In the meantime, I had terrible tooth trouble. My teeth were very bad and because of the lack of calcium when I was pregnant, they got very weak. About two weeks before we left, I went to a dentist because they told us I should have my teeth taken care of before we went to the States. I didn't realize what was going to happen. He decided to pull some teeth but he didn't take an x-ray. He started pulling and two teeth had their roots entangled. Then he decided he had to cut, but by that time the anesthesia had worn off. Two men held me down while he pulled and sawed and took out the teeth. I could hear the bone cracking and I was screaming and when I got home I was wild. They had to give me tranquilizers and they didn't help. I couldn't calm down for a week. He told me to come back the day before the ship left to have the stitches removed, but I was so afraid of him that I didn't go back. He was a butcher. I didn't go back to him and I went on the ship with the stitches still in. Three months later in Providence I sat down

one night with a mirror and tweezers and pulled them out myself. For years after I was afraid to go to a dentist.

Before we left for the States, I decided that I wanted to go see Frau Hoffman, the woman who kept you in Obervolkach. I told David that no matter what her intentions were - and her intentions were to keep you, to adopt you - the reason you were alive was because she kept you. You wouldn't have lived a day otherwise. After you were born, I washed you in the ice water in the sink and I made you a little shirt from a piece of rag I stole and I realized there was no way you could survive in the hay with the hawks and the mice and no food. No matter what her intention, you were alive and with us because that woman took care of you, because she thought of you as her own child. So we decided to visit her and bring her some gifts. She was a poor country woman and we had acquired a lot of things. She was in a better situation than us because she had a home and we were stateless but we had some food and things which she didn't. I decided to bring you in case she wanted to see you again. You had a white fur coat and I dressed you in it and you looked beautiful. We left Bernie with Sophie because we were traveling by car and it was a long trip. She was the only person we trusted.

Even earlier, when you turned four, David had started worrying about what we were going to do when you had to start school. We definitely didn't want to send you to a German kindergarten. On our street, Heinrichstrasse, there was a kindergarten run by a group of nuns. Finally we decided that maybe we could send you there. We felt it was not so German. So when you were four, we sent you there. You lasted about one hour. After one hour the nuns came running, frantic - you had disappeared. They knew you were a Jewish child and everybody was very sensitive on the subject. It turned out that at

ten o'clock the nuns gave the children cocoa and something to eat. You didn't like it so you just walked off. You obviously were a pretty good walker because one day you walked out of the house and we found you across town in the city park with a little German boy who was your friend. Despite cars and all, you managed to get out of the house and get to the park with him. There must have been ten people on bicycles running all over town looking for you. You knew the park because Sophie used to take you there to play, so you made it there with this little boy. We would not have found you except that a man told us that he had seen a little girl in a red apron in the sandbox. We found you both sitting in the sandbox playing very happily.

After that we decided to find a governess for you. I don't remember how we advertised, through an employment office or newspaper ad, but we got a lot of replies. We picked out the one we thought was the most impressive. She was a governess to some Austrian prince and baroness. We thought nothing could be better than that. So we hired this old maid. She was a holy terror. Maybe for a baroness she was fine because the baroness had a million servants. First of all she was very hungry. She must have had a hard time. The first few days she went in the kitchen and ate everything that was cooked. She ate up about twice the whole dinner for everybody. Finally she got over her hunger, but we didn't like her very much. She was very strict. Also Sophie got very upset because Sophie felt that you were her children; she had raised you and now the governess treated her like a maid. Sophie felt that her children had been taken away from her. I told the governess that Sophie was not the maid, that she had raised the children and shouldn't be treated badly, but the governess just took over and didn't let Sophie come close to you and Bernie. She would take you out and play games and close the

door to the room and she wouldn't allow Sophie in. Sophie was very upset. If Bernie woke up at night, we would sleep and Sophie would take him out of the bed and hug him and kiss him and change him and wash him - she was totally devoted. This governess lasted maybe a week, maybe not that long. We let her go and Sophie was back in her element and happy as could be. She was really terrific.

Anyway, we left Bernie with Sophie, and we took you to Obervolkach. We packed up coffee and margarine and sugar and canned peaches, all the things the Germans didn't have, and I took some materials and some cotton dresses which the HIAS had given us. First we went to see Frau Hoffman. She did not look at you. I don't know if she was mad, but she refused to look at you. She knew you, of course, but you didn't know her. You didn't react - you just ran around like any child that age. When I gave her the things I brought, she took them and asked us if we wanted some coffee. We thought maybe if we sat down and had coffee with her it would help. She served us coffee but all the time her head was turned away. It was a very bad visit and I thought that we should not have gone.

Since we were in Obervolkach we went up to the Englerts too. I just wanted her to see. He wasn't home and she was very pleasant, and she said to me "All the time you were sitting here and sewing, I knew that you were not an ordinary Polish worker. There was something about you. I didn't know that you were Jewish, but I knew that you were not an ordinary worker." After that, we had dinner in the inn. The owner's daughter came over and everybody in the village was very polite. They remarked how well we looked, and so on. They looked at us because we had a chauffeur and he opened the doors when we got out. The only sad part was the visit with Frau Hoffman. But we gave her the gifts

and I felt that I gave her something for her troubles. Maybe she felt bad, she raised a child and it had been taken away. So that was the end of that. I don't know if I did right or not by taking you there, but I did.

We went back to Fulda and a couple of weeks later we left for the States. We left Fulda June 1. We got dressed real warm because it was freezing there - you and Bernie wore heavy snow suits. We went to Bremerhaven where we stayed in a center where we all got numbers. You have a picture with the number hanging from your coat. We stayed there about three or four days and we were on the boat ten or eleven days. June sixteenth we arrived in the United States, so we must have gotten to Bremerhaven the second or the third of June, and left Germany the sixth.²⁵²

We arrived in New York on a Thursday. The ship actually arrived in the middle of the night, but we were kept on board while they started the entry procedures. We didn't even get to go to sleep. The day before they took away the blankets and the pillows; they said the immigration officers would be checking people all night long so that people could get off in the morning when the ship docked.

The ship docked at about six a.m. and a lot of people got off quickly, but they stopped me because of my lung. I still don't know what they discovered in the lung, but I had very bad pneumonia when I was at the Englerts. I couldn't breathe, but I had to work. Obviously it left a scar someplace, because they detained me, while David and you and Bernie sat in another room. We were very worried. You were all going to be let off

²⁵² We departed Bremerhaven on the U.S.A.T. General Stuart Heintzelman on June 6, 1949, and arrived in New York on June 16. Formerly an army transport ship, the Heintzelman was put in the service of the I.R.O. in 1947, picking up DPs in Bremerhaven and transporting them to the various countries which had accepted them as immigrants. We were on the ship's sixteenth trip, its first bringing DPs to the United States. The ship's souvenir booklet shows that there were 822 passengers, of whom 264 were Poles.

and I was going to be kept. If he stayed in the United States and I went back to Germany, I would never be able to come back because of the lungs. What was I going to do alone in Germany? What was he going to do alone with you? For a while we were very frightened. I wasn't the only one; they detained several people. Finally a second doctor came in and they had a big discussion and they took x-rays again and they let me go. So by the time we got off the pier it was about five in the afternoon. Luckily we didn't have a lot of luggage because we shipped everything ahead. In Germany they told us that you could fill a crate and ship it, so we shipped everything care of the refugee committee in Providence. When the crate came they brought it to our house. Some people who had luggage were in pitiful straits, because the customs officials opened everything. People had china and crystal strewn all over the street and the HIAS people were there with straw and excelsior trying to pack it up. They really worked. Luckily we didn't have anything - after the trying day all we needed was to have a pier full of plates.

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Biography

Helen Yomtov Herman was born September 16, 1943, in Obervolkach, Germany. She came to the United States with her family in June 1949. She resided in Providence, Rhode Island, until 1956 and then moved to Birmingham, Alabama. She received her B.A. from Newcomb College in 1965. In the next fifteen years she worked at various jobs, raised two children, and earned two masters degrees from Tulane University and a J.D. from Loyola Law School. She then served as a law clerk to Chief Justice John Dixon of the Louisiana Supreme Court and Judge Robert Katz of the Orleans Parish Civil District Court, taught at Loyola Law School (1981-86) and was Dean of Students at Tulane Law School (1989-1997).

